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ABSTRACT

This monograph presents a synthesis of current concerns and information relative to at-risk children. The report summarizes and discusses major issues concerning contemporary definitions of "at risk," the history of concern over at-risk children, general factors and conditions involved in placing children at risk, and contemporary issues regarding this population. The report is divided into 12 sections. Sections I through III contain a preface, an executive summary, and an introduction. Section IV presents at-risk definitions. Section V provides a historical perspective. Section VI discusses forces and factors that place students at risk. Section VII examines programming for at-risk students. Section VIII explores the establishment of student at-risk programs at the local school level. Section IX discusses and examines implications of the following: (1) impact of changing demographics; (2) attitudes toward diversity; (3) value conflicts between student and school; (4) personnel preparation; (5) regular education-special education relationship; (6) future directions for research; (7) interface between school reform efforts and at-risk students; and (8) excellence versus equity. Section X offers new perspectives on the education of at-risk children and youth. Section XI contains 76 references and Section XII lists additional sources of information. (AF)

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ED330757

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1990

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AT-RISK CHILDREN AND YOUTH:

A CRISIS IN OUR SCHOOLS AND SOCIETY

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Finally, we would like to dedicate this monograph to educators and other concerned individuals who are striving to improve the quality of life for those children who are educationally disadvantaged, homeless, living in poverty, or otherwise in jeopardy. This monograph is dedicated to your efforts.

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PREFACE

Recent estimates have indicated that approximately one-third of our nation's school children are at risk for educational failure (Levin, 1988a). At the same time, educators, policymakers, mental health professionals, and the general public have expressed concerns over children at risk in other ways: the homeless, the latchkey child, the child from a dysfunctional family, the teenage runaway, and the substance abuser. In fact, the number of categories for "at risk" seems to increase as dramatically as the percentage of children that appear to need special consideration and attention.

The current focus upon children at risk is both timely and admirable. It has been said before, but needs to be reiterated so that we do not allow it to become a lesser priority, that our children are our future, our greatest asset, and our greatest resource. Nevertheless, there seem to be many strands of concern regarding at-risk children, and these must be unified for effective policy development and implementation. In addition, while the increase in research and concern can only be beneficial, there appears to be considerable confusion over the sheer variety of categories and issues regarding at-risk children.

It is the purpose of this monograph, therefore, to present a synthesis of current concerns and information relative to at-risk children. Clearly, the recent proliferation of papers and articles dealing with at-risk children makes a complete review of the at-risk literature beyond the scope of this monograph. We will, however, summarize and discuss the major issues concerning contemporary definitions of <u>at risk</u>, the history of concern over at-risk children, the general factors and conditions involved in placing children at risk, and the contemporary issues regarding this population. Finally, new

perspectives are offered to assist educational and social policymakers in their efforts to develop effective policies and programs for children and youth who are widely viewed as being at risk of not only educational but also social failure.

We recognize that some readers may view the content of this monograph with a certain degree of skepticism. The authors of this document live and work in a relatively remote, rural, and sparsely populated section of the country. Very few of the major ethnic and racial minority groups (e.g., blacks and Hispanics), which are the focus of much of the at-risk literature, live in Maine. In fact, at-risk literature typically focuses on urban issues. Clearly, some of the problems are different and more intense in larger cities. The sheer numbers of students alone create substantial difficulties in serving at-risk students who live in inner cities. Yet, while acknowledging that demographic differences exist, we suggest that (a) problems facing schools in rural areas, pertaining to at-risk children, are numerous and need to be dealt with expeditiously, and (b) it would be parochial, provincial, and short-sighted to view the issue of at-risk children simply as an urban-rural issue or as a white-minority issue.

Educators in rural, largely white areas must be concerned about the problems of urban schools with large minority populations. Similarly, educators from inner city schools, who live daily with the problems of educating large minority populations, cannot close their eyes to the problems of their rural counterparts. At-risk children and youth are a universal problem in this country -- a problem that transcends geographical, socioeconomic, and cultural boundaries. As educators, as citizens, and also as human beings, we must share in the shame of the current at-risk situation in our schools and society as well as actually participate in solving the problems of at-risk children. With these efforts, the negative cycles of poverty and school failure can be

reversed and the problems facing many children can be, if not eradicated, significantly reduced.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A large and growing number of America's children are in jeopardy:

- ***1 million students drop out of school each year.***
- ***1.5 million teenage women become pregnant each year.***
- ***Between 1/5 and 1/4 of all U.S. children live below the poverty line.***
- ***On any given night it is estimated there are at least 100,000 homeless children.***
- ***Every year, more than 5,000 young people take their own lives.***
- ***More than 2.2 million cases of child abuse and neglect were reported in 1987.***
- ***Fifteen percent of graduates of urban high schools read at less than the 6th grade level.***
- ***Almost 10 million children have no regular source of medical care.***
- ***About 20 million children under age 17 have never seen a dentist.***
- ***An estimated 3 million children have a serious drinking problem.***

These are conservative estimates, and the young people cited above are not the only children at risk.

At-risk students presently are receiving unprecedented attention in both the professional literature and public communications media. They were a major focus of the educational summit called by President Bush on September 27 and 28, 1989. Often referred to as educationally disadvantaged, these children and youth are the subject of widespread debate and concern at the federal, state, and local levels in contemporary American society. Yet, disadvantaged students are not a new phenomenon in United States

public schools. For several years researchers (Hodgkinson, 1985; Levin, 1985; McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986) have called attention to the significant problem of educationally disadvantaged students within our schools, warning that unless more effective means can be found for delivering educational services to this population, not only would these students suffer personally, but also there would be severe negative consequences for our country's economic welfare and even our social and political stability.

During the late 1980s, the problem of at-risk students has taken on even more critical urgency. Several factors and conditions appear to have fostered this recent attention: (1) the rapidly growing numbers of children and youth who are considered to meet the criteria for inclusion within the "at-risk" definition -- the sheer magnitude of the problem; (2) changing sociodemographic characteristics within the United States which are presently viewed as placing increasingly larger number of students at risk of educational and social failure -- a recognition that America is changing; (3) projected sociodemographic changes which will occur in both the school-age population and American society as a whole during the next 30 years which indicate an even greater increase in the number of at-risk students -- the problem will get increasingly worse; (4) a growing, widespread dissatisfaction with the results of various past and present educational reform efforts which have targeted this population of students -- failed policies and programs; and (5) a broader-based concern and approach among policymakers both in and out of the educational field to address the complex and multifaceted problems which are involved in educating at-risk students -- the growing recognition that the severity and scope of the problem requires problem-solving collaboration and a commitment among representatives from several professional disciplines as well as from the public at large.

There is no universally accepted definition of at-risk students. Even the term, educationally disadvantaged, which is commonly used in a more specific sense in the literature to describe this population of students, historically has been defined in a variety of ways. In the educational arena, however, the term at risk generally has been employed to describe those children and youth who are likely to leave school at any age without those skills (academic, social, and/or vocational) necessary to lead a productive and fulfilled life in society.

Regardless of definition and criteria used, it is not possible to provide a precise number of students who are at risk in today's schools. Recent estimates place the number of educationally disadvantaged students in the United States at approximately 30% of the school-age population. However, many researchers suggest that this percentage is extremely conservative, and that the actual number of students who might be considered at risk to be significantly higher than this estimate. Despite the variance among definitions and estimates of actual numbers of at-risk students in today's schools, there currently exists strong agreement among researchers that this population of students is likely to grow steadily and significantly during the next 30 years -- presenting our public school system in America with a formidable challenge.

What are the forces or factors that place students at risk? What generally are considered to be the major indicators of at risk? First, there are broad societal factors which have been shown to correlate with poor educational performance: (1) poverty; (2) minority racial/ethnic group identity; (3) non-English or limited-English language background; and (4) specific family configurations (e.g., living in a single-parent household; limited education of mother).

Second, factors and conditions related specifically to the school environment and teacher-student interactions are widely recognized as contributing to placing students at

risk. Examples of such factors are an inappropriate curriculum; ineffective teacher-student interactions; insufficient student services; low teacher expectations; unrealistic or inappropriate standards; negative school climate; and lack of sensitivity to diversity.

The third major category of forces or factors which are viewed as placing students at risk are those that are more directly related to the students themselves -- factors which although they may appear to stem from deficits within the students, may be the result of external forces and influences such as low self-esteem; low aspirations; lack of interest or motivation; substance abuse; dangerous sexual practices; peer pressure; cognitive, emotional/behavioral, sensory, medical/physical, and learning deficits; excessive work schedule; and a different value system which may be incompatible with school.

Pallas, Natriello, and McDill (1989) identified the following five key indicators to be associated with educationally disadvantaged students: (1) minority racial/ethnic group identity; (2) living in a poverty household; (3) living in a single-parent family; (4) having a poorly educated mother; and (5) and having a non-English language background. They emphasized, however, that these five indicators are not independent. For example, a child living in a single-parent family also is likely to be living in a poverty household.

In brief, despite the broad nature of the indicators of at risk, we can be reasonably certain that children who presently live below the poverty line, children who come from minority racial/ethnic backgrounds, or children whose English is not their primary language are far more likely to perform poorly in school than are other children -- and also are far more likely to drop out of school. Results of research have consistently supported these conclusions.

What should be especially disturbing to policymakers and educators, however, are recent projections, based on U.S. Bureau of the Census and other data, which provide strong indications that the population of disadvantaged students will increase dramatically by 2020. It is clear that the sociodemographic characteristics of 1989 America are not those of 1950 America. Likewise, the sociodemographic configurations of 2020 America promise to be dramatically different from those of the present day if current trends continue. And, there appears to be little, or no, solid evidence to suggest otherwise.

Pallas, Natriello and McDill (1989), using current and projected data reported by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, cited the following projected changes in the characteristics of the American school-age population in 2020.

- In 1982, almost three of every four children in America were white. Only about one of two children in 2020 will be white. Whereas, only one in ten children were Hispanic in 1982, one in four children will be Hispanic in 2020. The proportion of black youth is expected to rise from 14.7% to 16% by 2020.

- As the number and proportion of black and Hispanic children increase, so will the number and proportion of children living in poverty. The number of children in poverty is projected to increase by 37% from 1984 to 2020. Our schools will need to serve 5.4 million more children in poverty in 2020 than they served in 1984.

- The number of children not living with both parents is expected to increase from 16.2 million in 1984 to 21.1 million in 2020, an increase of 30%.

- The number of children living with mothers who have low levels of educational attainment is projected to increase by 7.6 million from 1983 to 2020, an increase of 56%.

- The number of children whose primary language is other than English is expected to triple from 1982, approaching 6 million students by 2020.

(Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989)

An analysis of these projections clearly portrays a pessimistic future regarding at-risk students in America. As serious as the problem of educationally disadvantaged students is today, all of the key indicators generally employed to characterize this population are projected to show major increases during the next twenty-five to thirty years. By 2020, America's school-age population will be poorer, more racially/ethnically diverse, and living increasingly in single-parent households.

The face of America also is changing in other ways. There has been a large, recent influx of immigrant children. In 1988, it was estimated that as many as 2.7 million school-aged immigrants resided in the United States. Recent immigrants, mostly Asian, Hispanic and Caribbean, have tended to settle in certain states (e.g., California, Florida, New York, Texas, and Massachusetts) and already have drastically altered the face of public education in certain cities. For example, more than one-third of San Francisco United School District's students' primary language is other than English.

The scope of the problems presented by at-risk children can be overwhelming. Factors involving society and the family, involving the instruction and climate within a classroom, and involving the characteristics of the student himself or herself, can all serve to place a student at risk. In attempting to address the problem, educators and policymakers must consider factors along these dimensions. For this reason, flexibility in school structure is essential in developing comprehensive and effective programs.

Since problems of at-risk students are complex and multifaceted, programs to address the needs of at-risk youth must focus upon prevention, classroom change, and remediation. Flexibility in programming, with possible after-school or Saturday classes, also may be necessary to meet the needs of some at-risk students such as latchkey children. Similarly, school districts must attempt to provide flexible options, such as work study, for their secondary school youth.

No simple solutions exist. Success in meeting the needs of at-risk children is only possible through collaboration among schools, families, and social service agencies. The following areas of concern need to be addressed by policymakers in their efforts to provide at-risk children with appropriate and meaningful programs: (a) the impact of changing demographics on children; (b) attitudes toward diversity; (c) the value conflicts between the child and school; (d) the personnel preparation necessary for meeting the needs of at-risk children; (e) the regular education-special education relationship; (f) the future directions for research; (g) the interface between school reform and at-risk efforts; (h) the tension between excellence and equity; and (i) the broad societal changes which are necessary. Clearly, this list is not all-encompassing. It represents the major areas which the authors believe are important priorities to be addressed.

Efforts aimed at meeting the varied needs of at-risk children must be broad-based and must not be limited to an isolated and fragmented program for one group of at-risk students. Educators have a pivotal role in facilitating necessary services and programs. Nevertheless, to truly impact upon the factors which are creating increasing numbers of at-risk children, changes in our communities as well as in society at large are required. Underlying the critical issue of children at risk is the necessity for changes in values, attitudes, and priorities. In order to effect the societal changes that are required to stem the tide of homelessness, poverty, and educational disadvantage, we must overcome paralysis over the enormity of the problem and commit human and fiscal resources to initiatives at the local, state and federal levels.

In summary, the authors wish to suggest that recent attempts to establish national goals and performance standards for public education are ambitious and praiseworthy attempts at addressing our nation's educational ills. Such reform efforts

must, however, be extremely careful not to inadvertently have an adverse impact on disadvantaged children -- the very youth whom these efforts are designed, in large part, to assist. In addition, many summits, conferences, reports, and other monographs will undoubtedly surface to call attention to the problems of at-risk children. Unquestionably, some value will accrue from these efforts. They must not, however, divert attention and energy from addressing the immediate and critical needs of children at risk. The commissions, monographs, and reports are of little solace to the child who is at this moment living in poverty, homelessness, abuse, or hunger. Children facing these dire circumstances are in serious jeopardy, and addressing their immediate needs truly is a worthwhile national goal.

INTRODUCTION

"I used to go to school -- no more. Me and my mother and two brothers live in an old car 'til it gets too cold. Then, we try to find some buildings where no one lives any more and sleep there for the night. I hate school now. When the teachers or other kids ask, "where do you live? What do I say?" (Eric, 10 years old, Brooklin, Maine.)

Interest in at-risk students has increased significantly during the late 1980s. On September 27 and 28, 1989, President Bush held an "educational summit" with the nation's governors, and a major focus of the summit was the critical problems of at-risk students. References to "at risk" have become one of the major focal points of dialogue among educators, policymakers, and social critics in America. Numerous commissions, panels, and task forces at the federal, state, and local levels have been established to study and report on the problem of at-risk children and youth in today's society. Likewise, there has been a substantial increase in attention to at-risk students in the educational literature. Major conferences and symposia also have targeted this population of students.

Students at risk have been referred to as "America's shame" (MDC, Inc., 1988). Repeatedly, the critical question being asked about these students is: Why is it that in a country as affluent and presumably as progressive as ours do such large numbers of at-risk students (estimated at over 12 million and growing rapidly) exist? Not surprisingly, our nation's schools have been the primary object of the criticism with respect to at-risk children and youth. At the same time, however, our public education system has generally been perceived of as holding the key to solving this critical

dilemma. Seymour Sarason (1983) may have best articulated this current dilemma when he described how schools are typically viewed by the public: "Schools are both the 'scapegoat and salvation' for the nation's current social and economic ills."

Given the extremely broad scope of the parameters of at risk, it is understandable why many observers have expressed feelings of frustration and even hopelessness when attempting to deal with this current crisis in today's society. Despite its generally recognized wide prevalence and critical nature, the problem of at-risk students typically has been approached in a very haphazard fashion, usually leading to fragmented programming and service delivery systems. Quite accurately, school officials often claim that they are being asked to be the primary architects of a plan to solve the ills of society as a whole -- and, at the same time, are given fewer fiscal and human resources to accomplish this plan. The mere vastness and complexity of the issues and concerns surrounding at-risk students is conducive to the development of a very defensive posture on the part of public school personnel. While recognizing the seriousness of the problem of at-risk students, educators often feel that unless society as a whole demonstrates a greater willingness to confront this problem directly and also is willing to provide those resources necessary to solve the problem, their efforts toward resolution will continue to be largely piecemeal and generally ineffective.

American public education arguably has become the convenient "whipping boy" for the ills of society in general. Clearly, it is reasonable to question the values, attitudes, and priorities of American society which collectively shape today's policies and programs -- politically, economically, socially, and educationally. Yet, if schools are perceived of as the "scapegoat" for society's economic and social ills, they are also looked to, unrealistically or not, as having the potential for "saving" American society (Sarason, 1983). Therefore, it becomes readily apparent that we, as educators, have

little choice but to address the problem of at-risk students -- rigorously, systematically, and openly -- not from the perspective that it is our problem alone, but rather from the perspective that we have the responsibility and expectation to help contribute to its resolution, with the cooperation and support of others, and also with a sincere expression of understanding and compassion toward those children and youth who are, in some manner, considered to be at risk.

So, while concerns over at risk children transcend the school environment, our discussion will be aimed primarily at educators. Their ability to play the role of case managers will be emphasized. In attempting to synthesize current concerns and information on at-risk children, we have divided our discussion into the following general areas: (1) a summary of the current definitions of at-risk children; (2) an overview of the history of the concern for these students; (3) a summary of general factors and forces which have been shown to place students at risk; (4) selected contemporary issues involving programming for at-risk students; (5) general guidelines to assist in the development of programs to serve at-risk students at the local level; (6) a discussion of selected relevant issues and their implications; and (7) new perspectives on the education of at-risk students.

AT-RISK DEFINITIONS

"The Frederick County, Maryland, schools use one word that serves well to keep the definition of students at risk simple and flexible. That word is incompatibility. One administrator explains: 'Incompatibility between school and student is the inability of the student to adjust to the school and the school's inability to serve the student.' " (AASA Report, Students At Risk, 1989, p. 42).

Gathering information on children at risk constitutes a formidable task. Confusion and difficulties begin even with attempts to define who is at risk. Levin (1988a) stated that the definition of at risk "is so vague that it could easily encompass gifted and talented children, the physically or mentally handicapped, the obese, the shy, and so on" (p. 1).

So, who are today's students at risk? Couldn't every child be considered, at least to some extent, to be at risk? And, at risk of what? Dropping out of school? Graduating from school without those basic skills necessary to hold a decent job in the workforce? Failing to develop those personal and social skills required to become a self-fulfilled adult in today's and tomorrow's society? Inflicting irreparable physical harm upon themselves because of substance abuse problems? Battered children? Children who come from dysfunctional family situations in which parents are unwilling or unable to provide the support systems, financial or emotional, which are usually considered to be necessary for optimal learning and personal growth? Migrant students? Children who have no permanent home? Latchkey youth? Poor children? Students from ethnic, racial and/or limited-English speaking backgrounds? Pregnant teenagers? Children

and youth who have such low self-esteem that they are incapable of developing into truly fulfilled and productive citizens? Students with physical, emotional, sensory, cognitive, and learning deficits? Those children whose values, or those of their parents, may be incompatible with those of the school? Students whose teachers have minimal expectations for them, and therefore, fail to challenge them to reach their full potential?

All of the above types of students could be and, in fact, have been classified in the professional literature as being at risk. Catterall and Cota-Robles (1988) described three different, and common, conceptions of "at risk": (a) children from poor families; (b) children with different cultural backgrounds or minorities; and (c) children from limited English-speaking families. Slavin, Karweit, and Madden (1989) stated, "the meaning of the term [at risk] is never very precise, and varies considerably in practice" (p. 4, 5). They further stated that at risk often refers to those students who are unlikely to graduate from high school, although it may also refer to (1) students who leave school with an inadequate level of basic skills ; (2) students with a normal IQ, but who are not achieving the basic skills necessary for success in school or adult life; and (3) students who are eligible for compensatory or special education. The term at risk may refer to any or all of the above.

Slavin (1989), while acknowledging the extreme difficulty in providing a specific definition of the term at risk because of its extreme variance relative to how it is used in practice, offered as one possible definition: "Students who are at risk are those who, on the basis of several risk factors, are unlikely to graduate from high school" (p. 5). Among these risk factors would be low achievement, retention in grade, behavior problems, poor attendance, low socioeconomic status, and attendance at schools with large numbers of poor students. He also cautioned against employing a too narrow or restrictive definition of at risk.

Lipsky and Gartner (1989), in their analysis of recent school reform movements in the United States, suggested that the present attention being focused on at-risk students represents a return in part to the work of Ron Edmonds and the Effective Schools Research projects of the late 1970s which placed major emphasis on attempting to demonstrate that poor and minority children could benefit from effective schooling. These authors refer to at-risk students as a "euphemism for students of color, those living in poverty, and residents of inner cities, but not (generally) including those labeled as handicapped" (p. 266).

Commonly, at-risk students have been referred to as "educationally disadvantaged" in the professional literature. Levin (cited in NSBA Monograph, 1989, p.6) defined educationally disadvantaged as "those who lack the home and community resources to benefit from traditional schooling practices. Because of poverty, cultural obstacles, or linguistic differences, these children tend to have low academic achievement and high dropout rates. Such students are heavily concentrated among minority groups, immigrants, non-English speaking families, and economically disadvantaged populations" (p. 6).

Often these educationally disadvantaged students are associated with our inner cities. Yet, this popular perception that at-risk children and youth are found almost exclusively in inner-city schools in poor neighborhoods is challenged in a recent report, An Equal Chance: Educating At-Risk Children to Succeed published by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) in 1989. Findings contained in this report suggested that "as many as three-fifths of this population [at risk] may be dispersed throughout the country in rural and suburban areas" (p. 1).

Further, the NSBA Task Force on At-Risk Youth encouraged local school boards to develop their own working definition of local youth who are considered to be at risk --

one which reflects issues and factors which reflect local concerns and demographics. As a general guideline, the NSBA Task Force offered the following broad definition of at-risk children and youth: "Those who are subject to environmental, family, or societal forces over which they have no control and which adversely affect their ability to learn in school and survive in society. As a result, they have uncertain futures as students, workers, and citizens, and ultimately are unlikely to become productive members of our society" (An Equal Chance: Educating At-Risk Children to Succeed: Recommendations for School Board Action, NSBA, 1989, p. 6).

Clearly, it is very difficult to develop a specific definition of students at risk -- or at least one which would gain widespread acceptance among all who might rightfully view themselves as having a special interest and investment in this population, including professionals from various disciplines, parents, advocates, policymakers, as well as students themselves. There certainly are some students who may do quite well academically and even graduate with honors, but who are at high risk emotionally or socially. There are others who would likely not be considered to be at risk as measured by most commonly employed criteria but who suffer a great deal of pain during their schooling because they are generally viewed and treated as different from the established norm. These students often have different value systems from the majority of their peers. This diversity is not valued, respected, or in many cases, not tolerated; while in others, it is even ridiculed. As a result, some students because of their incompatibility with the general norm are placed at high risk for poor overall adjustment. In our judgment, these students should also be considered to fall within the parameters of being at risk.

In general, however, most authors characterize at-risk students as those who are likely to leave school without the necessary skills to succeed academically, socially,

and/or vocationally in today's or tomorrow's society. They are those children and youth, who for whatever reason or combination of reasons, are not prepared to become self-reliant citizens. They are those students who have already dropped out of school as well as those in school who are likely to drop out instead of graduating. These at-risk students often are regarded as victims -- victims of forces and factors which serve to contribute adversely to the likelihood of their reaching their full potential as adults in today's and tomorrow's American society.

Clearly, a variety of conceptions of "at risk" presently exists. Nevertheless, however one defines "at risk," the number of children considered at risk is likely to grow if recent demographic trends are any indication. The following information provides a summary of these developments that may well have an adverse effect on our nation's children:

FACTORS AFFECTING AT-RISK CHILDREN

****** Our nation is getting <u>older</u>***

- *The median age in 1970 was <u>28.</u>*
- *The projected median age for 2000 is <u>36.5.</u>*
- *The elderly will increasingly compete with children for fiscal and human resources.*

****** Our nation is becoming <u>more culturally diverse</u>***

- *Approximately 30% of all students are minority.*
- *It is estimated that by the year 2000, one out three Americans will be either Black, Hispanic, or Asian.*
- *Minority children are more likely to be affected by poverty.*

*** **Children are poorer**

- Although children comprise 25% of the U.S. population, they represent 40% of the nation's poor.
- Between 1/5 and 1/4 of all U.S. children live below the poverty line.
- 46% of black children live below the poverty line.
- 40% of Hispanic children live below the poverty line.
- 16% of white children live below the poverty line.
- Of the 3 million of "newly poor" children, 2 million are white.
- Our poorest children live with SINGLE MOTHERS (54%).
- A child dies of poverty every 53 seconds in the U.S.

*** **Changing Family Patterns**

- In 1955, 60% of all U.S. households consisted of a working father, a housewife mother, and two or more school-age children. In 1985, only 7% fit this pattern.
- 59% of all children born 1983 will live with one parent before age 18.

*** **Teenage Parents**

- More than 1 million teens become pregnant each year.
- U. S. teens under age 15 are at least 15 times more likely to give birth than their peers in other western nations.
- 70% of teen births are out of wedlock.
- Only 56% of all teen mothers graduate from high school (only 33% of Hispanic teen mothers graduate).
- Welfare assistance is needed by 73% of teen mothers within four years.
- Everyday in the U.S., 40 teenage girls give birth to their THIRD CHILD.
- A teenager has a baby every 67 seconds in the U.S.

*** **Homeless/Transient**

- *It is estimated that there are 10 to 12 million "latchkey" children in the U.S. (approximately 1/4 to 1/3 of all children).*

- *On any given night in the U.S., there are at least 100,000 children who are homeless (Sept. 1988).*

- *Families with children are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population (40%).*

*** **Migrant**

- *Over 500,000 students in the U.S. are migrants.*

- *Dropout rates among migrants are estimated to range between 45% and 90%.*

*** **Child Abuse and Neglect**

- *More than 2.2 million cases of child abuse and neglect were reported in 1987.*

- *50% increase in reported child abuse cases over previous five years.*

*** **Youth/Suicide**

- *Every year more than 5,000 young people take their own lives.*

- *It is estimated that there are 500,000 suicide attempts by youth each year.*

- *The suicide rate among youth has more than doubled in the past twenty years.*

- *Actual suicides and suicide attempts among very young children (ages 5 to 10) are reported as increasing significantly.*

*** **Public School Dropouts**

- *Approximately 25% of public school students drop out.*

- *Dropout rates for some inner city schools reach 75%.*

- *Dropouts from each high school class cost the nation $228 billion dollars in lost revenue.*

- *A student drops out of school every 16 seconds of every school day in the U.S.*

The information above was gathered from a variety of contemporary sources including Hodgkinson, 1985; the National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1986; the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 1989; and the AASA Critical Issues Report: Students At Risk: Problems and Solutions, 1989.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

"The time has come to marry the equity considerations of the 1970s with the Excellence-in-Education concerns of the 1980s and begin educating in a way intended to reach every American youth instead of only those lucky, advantaged ones in the front rows." (MDC, Inc., 1988, p. 6)

Since the beginning of public education in the United States, some students have been viewed as uneducable, as having unusual instructional needs, as being recalcitrant, morally unfit, or as just not "fitting in" to the public education system. During the period from 1800 to 1850, for example, these students were viewed as "dunces", of lesser human quality and value. In the period from 1850-1900, students who didn't fit were still seen as having character defects, although some humanitarian movements emerged which sought better care and treatment for those who suffered from physical or mental handicaps (Cuban & Tyack, 1988).

The period from 1900 to 1950 saw a dramatic rise in enrollment in our public schools. With this increase, schools struggled with maintaining efficiency for large numbers of students, and students who didn't fit were placed in special schools or segregated facilities. During the late 1950s and continuing throughout the most of the 1960s, the segregated "special class" model emerged as the primary instructional and placement vehicle for "handicapped" students. Supported largely by federal funding, special education programs developed rapidly in our schools -- thus beginning the dual educational system in the United States: one for "normal" students and another for students who were viewed as having different instructional needs, who were assumed to have "handicaps" which prevented them from benefitting from "regular" class

instruction or placement, and who were regarded as "different" from the majority of their peers. Most of these students were labeled as "mildly" or "educable" mentally retarded. All other handicapped students were, in effect, excluded from public education. "Moderately" retarded students generally were educated in private, non-publically supported settings. And, although the concept of specific learning disabilities was first introduced in 1963, the learning disabled population of students did not receive any significant attention from public educators until the early 1970s.

The late 1960s and 1970s frequently are referred to as the "period of legislation, litigation, and advocacy for handicapped rights." Drawn to a large degree from the context, and the logical outgrowth, of the Civil Rights movement, this period witnessed the rendering of several significant judicial decisions (e.g., Larry P. v. Riles, 1972, 1974, 1979; Mills v. Board of Education, 1972; Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1972) dealing with the due process rights of handicapped students, as well as the enactment of several substantive pieces of legislation impacting upon this population at both the federal and state levels. The most significant piece of legislation, of course, was PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which was enacted in 1975.

On a much broader level, educational programs for "at-risk students" in the United States during the mid-1960s were shaped by the Great Society pieces of legislation designed to eradicate poverty. Major efforts were placed on urban renewal, reinvigorating rural life, and acknowledging ethnic history while pushing for the economic rewards of sociocultural assimilation. "Fixing" societal institutions was supposed to lead to remedies that would improve education for children (Heath & McLaughlin, 1987). Federal programs were developed which were designed to help at-risk students compensate for their cultural and social "deficits" in their educational

environments. The most prominent of these efforts was PL 89-10, the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, as Amended (Title 1) -- which continues to provide services to "disadvantaged" students today, although it is currently referred to as Chapter 1.

Unquestionably, the most significant publication dealing with the issue of disadvantaged children was the Equal Educational Opportunities Study (EEOS) prepared by James Coleman and his colleagues in 1966. This study's findings might best be summarized as follows:

> Schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context ... this very lack of an independent effect means that the inequality imposed on children by their home, neighborhood and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. For equality of educational opportunity must imply a strong effect of schools that is independent of the child's immediate social environment, and that strong independence is not present in American schools. (Coleman et al., 1966, p. 325)

As stated by Lezotte (1989):

> Coleman and his colleagues clarified the public policy issue by bringing into sharp contrast the question of whether student achievement derives more from the homes from which children have come or the schools to which they are sent. The issue has been and will likely continue to be fundamental to the discourse on student achievement for a long time to come. It is basic in that it serves to question the sensibleness of increasing public investments in public schools if, in fact, schools do not, and seemingly cannot make a difference (p. 27).

Subsequent to the publication of the Coleman report, several researchers took issue with Coleman's conclusions and produced findings which they suggested refuted Coleman's major hypothesis. Most of these studies came to be known as "effective schools movement" research and dealt with actual school programs which reportedly demonstrated that "schools can reverse the disadvantages of social and economic deprivation."

Some of the most commonly cited effective schools research reports are the following: Inner City Children Can Be Taught To Read (Weber, 1971); Search for Effective Schools: The Identification and Analysis of City Schools That Are

Instructionally Effective for Poor Children (Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1979); "Research for School Improvement: An Appraisal of Some Recent Trends" (MacKenzie, Educational Researcher, 1983); "School Reform: The District Policy Implications of the Effective Schools Literature" (Purkey & Smith, Elementary School Journal, 1985); and "School Effects" (Good & Brophy, Third Handbook of Research on Teaching, 1986).

During the current decade, the publication of A Nation at Risk by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 ushered in a new wave of educational reform in the United States. Frequently referred to as the "first wave" of recent educational reform, this document presented an extremely dismal portrayal of the current status of public education in the United States. This report, along with scores of others that followed, challenged educators primarily at the state level to develop higher standards and more rigorous graduation requirements for students. This "first wave" of reform also focused on the need to upgrade teacher salaries, to improve the quality of teaching, and to develop teacher career ladder programs (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989).

While this "first wave" of recent educational reforms emphasized change essentially at the state level, a "second wave" developed which shifted reform emphasis to the local level. Less emphasis was placed upon federal and state regulations and more emphasis on teacher and principal empowerment at the school level. Principals and teachers were encouraged to restructure the experience of schooling at the building level -- and be empowered with the flexibility and resources to accomplish this difficult task without being encumbered by federal regulations. This "second wave" also encouraged schools to develop stronger and more meaningful relationships with parents and the community -- to involve them in both the governance and operation of educational programs at the local level. Common slogans of the "second wave" were "teacher empowerment" and "teacher professionalism." One of the most prominent "reform

reports" during this period was the Carnegie Report (1986): A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century (Lilly, 1988; Lipsky and Gartner, 1989).

The emphasis upon at-risk students in the larger education reform movements which have taken place in the United States, however, is relatively new. Earlier major educational reform efforts (other than those for "handicapped students") generally were aimed at improving the quality of schooling for the "average" or "bright" student in response, at least partially, to a national concern that we as a country were falling behind our competitors militarily, scientifically, and/or economically. Emphasis was on "excellence in education." For example, the launching of Sputnik in 1957 caused a sudden interest in the education of the gifted (Maker, 1986).

Some have referred to the recent emphasis on at-risk students as the "third wave" of educational reform. Several recent national reports have called for varying degrees of restructuring of our public schools in order to more adequately meet the needs of students considered to be "at risk." Many of these reports have focused upon the needs of socioeconomically deprived and/or ethnolinguistically diverse students.

For example, in 1985 the National Coalition of Advocates for Students published Barriers to Excellence: Our Children At Risk which argued that poor and minority students are being discriminated against because of the way our public schools are structured, operated, and financed.

> The rising number of school dropouts is the single most dramatic indicator of the degree to which schools are failing children. Drop-out rates for Black students are just under twice as great as for White students; those for Hispanic students are just over twice as great...
>
> We reject the implication raised in current public debate that excellence in education for some children can be made available only at the expense of other children. Indeed, it is our deepest belief that excellence without equity is both impractical and incompatible with the goals of a democratic society...
>
> We reject the argument, so fashionable today, that all social programs have failed. Head Start works and should be expanded to include other eligible children. Compensatory education provided through Title I also reaches and helps poor children. These programs, however, serve only a fraction of children of

> greatest need, and the elements which made them effective, as well as their funding, have been weakened in the last several years (p. xi).

As cited by Lipsky and Gartner (1989), "The recommendations of the two major recent reports [on at-risk students] are similar. The Committee for Economic Development (Children in Need, 1987) calls for prevention through early intervention, restructuring the schools (through new roles for teachers, bottom up management, collaboration with the home, employability skills, ease of reentry for dropouts), and partnerships among schools, business, and the community. The Carnegie Commission (An Imperiled Generation, 1988) also calls for a priority to be given to the early years, and advocates smaller schools, where students have a sense of belonging, as well as a coherent curriculum, more flexibility in calendar and access, better facilities, and collaboration among schools, parents, colleges, and corporations" (pp. 266-267).

In a similar vein, several researchers recently have argued for the virtual elimination of commonly used pull-out instructional programs for educationally disadvantaged and/or mildly handicapped students, stating that these programs have been demonstrated to be instructionally and fiscally ineffective as well as being largely discriminatory in nature (Biklen, 1989; Gartner & Lipsky, 1989; Goodlad & Oakes, 1988; Sapon-Shevin, 1989; Slavin, Madden & Kartweit, 1989; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Skrtic,1986,1987).

Rather than perpetuating the suggested inequality and ineffectiveness of traditional pull-out models for at-risk students, several researchers have proposed that instructional programs for these students rely more heavily, if not exclusively, upon (1) continuous progress and certain forms of cooperative learning programs" (Slavin, 1987; Slavin, Stevens & Madden, 1988) and/or (2) peer learning programs which utilize various forms of tutorial instructional services (Bickel & Bickel, 1986; Jenkins & Jenkins, 1981; Levin, 1985; Osguthorpe & Scruggs, 1986).

One of the most recent and perplexing issues of concern to educators in the United States has been the rapid increase of immigrant students in our public schools, especially those from Third World countries. Clearly, this very heterogeneous group of students currently is recognized as constituting one of the largest "at-risk" segments within our schools. A recent report prepared by the National Coalition of Advocates for Students, entitled, New Voices: Immigrant Students in U.S. Public Schools (1988), provides a comprehensive and vivid portrayal of the current status of educational opportunities and programs for these students:

> Despite the fact that every immigrant child has the legal right of access to a free public education, serious problems with access exist. Many schools discourage immigrant children from enrolling. Once inside the schoolhouse, these children continue to experience barriers to a comprehensive and effective education. (p. xii)
>
> Immigrant students need years to learn a new language and make difficult adjustments; but most U.S. schools are not structured to provide this time. Immigrant students are more likely to be retained in-grade, inappropriately placed in low academic tracks on the basis of language limitations or slow academic progress. The cumulative effects of these experiences often cause immigrant students to leave school early, and create great emotional stress. (p. xii)
>
> Recent school reforms have produced schools that are meritocratic, less flexible, and less able to respond to the needs of highly diverse student populations. Unless schools are restructured in fundamental ways, school success will elude large number of immigrant students. (p. xii)

The Regular Education Initiative Debate

The field of special education witnessed its own educational reform movement during the late 1980s which paralleled to a large extent the broader reform efforts being directed toward the schooling of at-risk students. In fact, this reform movement, commonly referred to as the Regular Education Initiative (REI) has focused on, and it is directly related to, many of the same issues which concern policymakers and

researchers involved in the educational programming for poor, ethnic minority, and other children who are viewed as being at risk in today's society.

The REI debate currently is receiving a great deal of attention in the special education literature (Davis,1989; Davis, & McCaul, 1988; Gerber, 1988; Kauffman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988; Lilly, 1988; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Skrtic, 1987, 1988; Vergason & Anderegg, 1989). The results of this discourse are likely to have a significant impact upon our public schools' service delivery system to handicapped and other special needs students (e.g., Chapter 1, migrant, multicultural, etc.)

Thus far, despite a few exceptions (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989), the REI debate has largely taken place among researchers and scholars who are affiliated with special education departments within universities and colleges. The REI discourse has raised the question of whether current school organizational patterns can adequately meet the needs of an increasingly complex and changing society.

As commonly viewed, proponents of the REI are calling for a thorough review and examination of the current system employed in public schools to identify, instruct, and place students who are either judged to be handicapped, or who are viewed as requiring some type of remedial or compensatory services. They contend that the present dual system (one for special students and another for regular education students) requires major restructuring. They argue that the current system employed by special educators to identify, instruct, and place students is essentially flawed, based upon some faulty assumptions, and is largely ineffective both programmatically and fiscally (Lilly, 1988,1989; Sapon-Shevin, 1989). In brief, proponents are calling for a critical examination of past and present special education policies and practices, along with a restructuring of our public education system, so that all students can be better served,

particularly those students with special needs and/or those students who are considered to be at risk of "falling through the cracks" of this system.

Opponents of the REI, although usually in general agreement with many aspects of its overall goals, raise concerns and questions relative both its soundness and achievability at this time. They argue that most proponents have not given careful enough consideration to the potentially dangerous implications of the REI for special needs students. They contend that current special education policies and practices are essentially sound and, if abandoned, many handicapped students could suffer irreparable harm. Opponents argue that most special education policies and practices have come about because of deficiencies and inequities which exist within regular education and, therefore, it makes little sense to place handicapped students back into this very system, one which has not sufficiently demonstrated its willingness or capability to adequately serve these students (Gerber, 1988; Hallahan, Keller, McKinney, Lloyd, & Bryan, 1988; Kauffman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988; Keogh, 1988; Lieberman, 1985; Vergason & Anderegg, 1989).

It is important to note that the issues and concerns being addressed in the suggested "third wave" of educational reform -- which focuses on at-risk students in the broad sense, as well as in the REI discourse, which more specifically addresses the policies and practices related to handicapped students -- both deal with "attitudes toward diversity." Current political, social, economic, and educational policies and practices which affect the lives of children and youth who are perceived as being "different from the norm" are being challenged. These reform movements are essentially calling for fundamental changes in the ways in which our public schools view these students -- how they are accepted, taught, and, most of all, valued.

FORCES AND FACTORS THAT PLACE STUDENTS AT RISK

"Fifteen percent of recent graduates of urban high schools read at less than sixth grade level. One million teenage children between twelve and seventeen cannot read above the third grade level. Eighty-five percent of juveniles who came before the courts are functionally illiterate. Half the heads of households classified below the poverty line by federal standards cannot read an eighth grade book. Over one-third of mothers who receive support from welfare are functionally illiterate." (Illiterate America, Jonathan Kozol, 1985, p. 3).

Statistics such as those cited above have forced educators to become increasingly concerned about the future of our children. Caterall and Cota-Robles (1988) estimated that there are 20 million school age children who could be considered at risk. This constitutes approximately 30% of the population. Slavin and Madden (1988) stated that some urban districts are retaining up to 20% of students in each grade, which constitutes an approximate measure of educational failure.

As indicated earlier, the number of students considered to be at risk is also likely to increase if recent demographic trends are any indication. For example, Bowen, Purrington, Layton, and O'Brien (1989) report that families with children were the fastest growing homeless group, representing 38% of all the nation's homeless. It is presently estimated that there are 220,000 homeless school-age children in the nation.

Further, a Congressional Budget Office estimate placed 22% of all children in poverty (NASDSE, 1989). Another estimate considered 25% of children as living in poverty with the rates as high as 50% for black children and 40% for Hispanics, and

these are the groups with the fastest growing birth rates (Strong, 1989). Hodgkinson (1985) projected an almost 200% increase in the nation's population of blacks by the year 2020, and an almost 300% increase in the Hispanic population. Further, while there is a projected 17% increase in the number of 0 to 5 year olds (NASDSE, 1989), a large proportion of this increase will be poor and minority: "The total U.S. population for 2020 will be about 265 million people, a very small increase from our current 238 million -- and more than 91 million of that figure will be minorities (and mostly young, while the mostly white Baby Boom moves out of the child rearing years by 1990, creating a "Baby Bust" that will again be mostly white while minority births continue to increase)" (Hodgkinson, 1985, pp. 6-7).

During the same time period, spending on education -- at least when adjusted for inflation -- has generally decreased. In the period from 1980 to 1989, spending on Chapter 1 fell 12%; spending for Chapter 2 decreased 62%; impact aid fell 42%; and vocational education spending decreased 28%. Funds for bilingual programs were cut 47%. Interestingly, special education funding over the 1980 to 1989 period increased by 4% even when adjusted for inflation (NASDSE, 1989). Hodgkinson (1985) stated: "A child under six is six times more likely to be poor than a person over 65. This is because we have increased support for the elderly, and government spending for poor children has actually DECLINED during the past decade. The result is an increase of over two million children during the decade who are 'at risk' from birth. Almost half of the poor in the U.S. are children" (p. 5). [Note: At the time of the publication of this monograph, an 18% increase in grants for Chapter 1 funding for FY90 had been proposed (CD Publications, 1989).]

Additional demographic changes that may affect this percentage include the Bureau of the Census projection indicating that 59% of the children born in 1983 will

be living with one parent before reaching age 18 (Hodgkinson, 1985). As of 1985, 12% of children were born out of wedlock, 40% were born to parents who divorce before the child is 18, 5% were born to parents who separate, 2% were born to parents one of whom will die before the child reaches 18, and 41% will reach age 18 "normally". Further, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (1989) reported that 89% of teachers in a recent survey cited abused or neglected children as a significant problem within their school.

Despite the difficulties in trying to derive a list of factors that place children at risk, there appears to exist general consensus among contemporary researchers and policymakers regarding the following factors relative to the status of at-risk children and youth in the United States.

* * * ***The number of children and youth considered to be at risk of educational and/or social failure is significant and seems to be growing at an alarming rate.***

* * * ***Three broad societal forces that place students at risk are poverty, hardships related to minority status, and changing family configurations (e.g., the increase of single-parent and dual working parent families).***

* * * ***Many students are placed at risk due to irresponsive and inappropriate curricula, inappropriate or ineffective teaching strategies, unrealistic educational standards, low teacher expectations for student performance, lack of availability of basic***

instructional and student support services within our schools, an overall school climate which is often perceived by students as being negative, and teacher insensitivity to student diversity.

* * * *A large segment of students are placed at risk because of forces and factors within their own personal lives: low self esteem; low aspirations; chemical abuse; unresolved emotional conflicts; learned inappropriate and potentially devastating behaviors; negative peer pressure; dangerous sexual practices, etc. Certainly some of these factors may be directly or indirectly related to family, school, or even broader societal issues and dynamics.*

* * * *Generally students who are considered to be disabled or handicapped have not been included within the at-risk literature but rather they are usually viewed as being included within the more specific "special education" category -- and thereby theoretically under the jurisdiction of Public Law 94-142. However, several researchers and scholars, primarily from within the special education field, recently have severely criticized the perpetuation of the present dual educational system which currently exists in the United States. In what is commonly referred to as the Regular Education Initiative (REI) or more recently as the General Education Initiative, these writers are advocating for a unitary educational system which would encompass both regular education and special education populations and programs.*

In fact, one of the major arguments being put forth by REI proponents is that many children and youth who are presently viewed as "at risk" (but who are "outside of the current special education system because they have been declared ineligible" -- as well as most mildly and moderately handicapped students presently within the special education system) would be more effectively served if the current dual educational system were to be abolished. They argue that the present dual system is ineffective as well as discriminatory against both handicapped and other at risk but "special education ineligible" students.

For a more detailed discussion of the Regular Education Initiative debate, particularly as it relates to public education's responsibilities for dealing with at-risk students, the reader is referred to the following sources: (Davis, 1989; Davis & McCaul, 1988; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Hallahan, Keller, McKinney, Lloyd & Bryan, 1988; Kauffman, Hallahan, & Lloyd, 1988; Stainback & Stainback, 1985). Despite this contemporary discourse, however, it appears accurate to state that the term <u>at-risk student</u> as presently employed in the school reform literature, largely ignores those considered to be handicapped or otherwise covered under the special education umbrella.

> * * * ***The focus on at-risk students transcends political, economic, social, as well as educational thought and action. As the forces which are generally considered to place most children and youth at risk often are imbedded in broader social, economic, and political conditions which exist in the United States, it is likewise generally believed that unless opportunities for significant educational improvement can be had for most at-risk students, serious economic, political, and social consequences will result. If the cycles of poverty and abuse and neglect, for example, which characterize many at-risk children and youth, are not broken -- and these students are not able to derive more benefit from their educational programs -- the long-term negative consequences upon the entire socioeconomic-political fabric of our country are predictable.***

Clearly, a multitude of forces and factors exist that may contribute to placing student at risk. In summary, these forces may be viewed as falling into three broad categories: (a) societal factors, (b) school environment conditions, and (c) student characteristics. These categories are depicted in Figure 1.

FORCES/FACTORS THAT PLACE STUDENTS AT-RISK

SOCIETY	SCHOOL	STUDENT
Poverty	Inappropriate Curriculum	Low Self-Esteem
Minority Racial/Ethnic Group Identity	Ineffective Teacher-Student Interactions	Low Aspirations
Non-English or Limited-English Language Background	Insufficient Support Services (e.g., Counseling, Remedial)	Lack of Interest or Motivation
Family/Home Homeless Latchkey Child Child Abuse/Neglect Single Parent Family Dysfunctional Family Educational Level of Parents	Unrealistic/Inappropriate Standards	Chemical Abuse
	Repeated Failure (Cycle)	Dangerous Sexual Practices
	School Climate Not Conducive to Positive Development	Peer Pressure/Rejection
	Lack of Sensitivity to Diversity	Lack of Self Discipline
		Cognitive Deficits
		Emotional/Behavioral Deficits
		Learning Deficits
		Sensory Deficits
		Medical/Physical Deficits
		Different Value System (Incompatibility)
		Excessive Work

Figure 1.

PROGRAMMING FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

"Schools seeking to meet the needs of immigrant students, who may be learning in different ways at a different pace, must avoid the time traps generated by lockstep assessment, placement, and instructional procedures. Flexible strategies best accommodate differences in language, culture, and learning style." (Paul Cheng, Principal, Newcomer H.S., San Francisco, New Voices, 1988, p. 92.)

There are currently a myriad of interventions for at-risk students. Perhaps Mann (1986) stated the situation best in discussing school dropouts: "Virtually everything is being done and ... at the delivery level we cannot yet tell to whom or with what effect. Thus, we are doing a lot and learning a little about the multiple palliatives" (p. 9). A complete summary of such a variety of interventions is clearly beyond the scope of this document. In this section, therefore, we present a summary of some of the current thinking on programming for at-risk students.

Slavin and Madden (1989) performed an extensive review of the literature on effective practices with students at risk. At the outset, they noted that most traditional approaches have not worked. Neither retaining lower achieving students nor separating students for pull-out programs has demonstrated effectiveness. In addition, pull-out programs have been criticized as stigmatizing (Stainback & Stainback, 1985).

In determining what does work, Slavin and Madden (1989) identified three broad categories for intervention: (a) prevention, (b) classroom change, and (c) remediation.

Prevention. In the first category, the authors noted that prevention programs typically target preschool, kindergarten, or first grade. Preschool programs have, of

course, long been in existence, and recent research has focused upon the effectiveness of programs such as Head Start. This research has generally found that children in preschool programs show positive gains in language and IQ but that these effects tend to "wash out" by 2nd or 3rd grade. (The authors did note, however, that some recent longitudinal research indicated that preschool participation may have a positive impact on increasing chances of high school graduation and decreasing delinquency.) The authors stated their belief that preschool programs "may be seen as a means of getting students off to a good start in school, not as a program that, in isolation, is likely to reduce substantially students' risk of school failure" (pp.7-8).

Further, a review of the literature by Karweit (1989) indicated that full-day kindergarten produced effects very similar to those of preschools and that they may also be seen as a means of getting students off to a good start rather than as programs that are a sufficient intervention unto themselves. Within the kindergarten classroom, Slavin and Madden (1989) found that certain approaches, such as programmed instruction and cooperative learning, are more successful with at-risk youngsters than traditional approaches. The authors also suggested that first grade prevention programs focus upon success in developing beginning reading skills. They noted that, since reading is generally regarded as the key element to successful later school experiences, first grade may well be the crucial time for intervention. These authors also suggested that effective approaches to teaching reading focus upon tutoring or small-group instruction. Again, questions persist relative to the longevity of gains in these programs if there is no further intervention.

Classroom Change Programs. Slavin and Madden (1989) asserted that one source of "prevention" is providing the best possible classroom instruction at the beginning of the student's school experience. They found that effective classroom

approaches focused upon "continuous progress models" and "certain forms of cooperative learning." In the former, students work toward instructional objectives at their own pace. Further, they are taught in small groups of students who are at similar levels of skill on the task at hand. The cooperative learning approach focuses upon small group "learning teams" with heterogeneous student skill levels. Teams are rewarded on the basis of the individual learning of all team members. Some commercial cooperative learning materials have demonstrated effectiveness relative to traditional methods. (For a list of these and other materials, see Slavin and Madden, "What Works for Students at Risk: A Research Synthesis," Educational Leadership, February, 1989.)

Supplementary/Remedial Programs. As noted earlier, the effectiveness of "most widely used supplementary/remedial programs, diagnostic-prescriptive pullout programs provided under Chapter 1 or special education funding, show little evidence of effectiveness" (Slavin & Madden, 1989, p. 10). Nevertheless, these authors argued that some "remedial tutoring programs" and some "computer-assisted instruction" have led to significant student gains. Remedial tutoring programs, in this sense, are considered to be one-to-one tutoring using either older students or community volunteers. Some computer-assisted instruction, although much of the research is considered to be "highly variable" in quality, has been found to be effective. To be effective, these programs (e.g., computer-assisted instruction) should be used in conjunction with regular class instruction.

Slavin and Madden (1989) argued that there are some general principles for effective programs. These are: (a) effective programs are comprehensive; (b) effective preventive and remedial programs are intensive; and (c) effective programs frequently assess student progress and adapt instruction to individual needs. Further, schools must address the needs of at-risk students with a comprehensive plan -- success

requires commitment of the teaching staff and of the district's financial resources. Also, classroom change must be the focus of cooperative efforts. If the district is willing to make these necessary changes, progress for at-risk students can occur.

Accelerated Schools. One of the more recent and promising developments for at-risk students is that of accelerated schools. These schools are based on the premise that compensatory programs and remediation are not effective approaches. Specifically, these programs "institutionalize" the students as slow learners, thus reducing teacher expectations; they slow down the pace of instruction so students get farther and farther behind; fail to motivate students; do not close the achievement gap between these and other students; and do not help students develop effective learning strategies (Levin, 1988b).

An alternative is "accelerated education" -- that is, education designed to "substantially increase the overall pace of learning, that is, to effect accelerated learning" (Levin, 1988a, p. 9). Levin (1988a) stated, "To close the achievement gap, disadvantaged children must learn at a faster rate than other children. Accordingly, the design and implementation of schooling interventions for the educationally disadvantaged must be based upon principles of accelerating their learning beyond their normal rate -- indeed beyond the rate of learning of the non-disadvantaged" (p. 3). The Stanford Accelerated Schools Project has initiated accelerated school projects at two elementary schools in the San Francisco Bay area. The overriding goal of these schools is to have at-risk students catch up to their peers by sixth grade. Four premises underlie the accelerated education projects: (a) high expectations and high status for the participants; (b) a specific deadline for closing the achievement gap of at-risk children; (c) a fast-paced curriculum that includes concepts, analysis, problem-solving, and

interesting applications; and (d) the involvement of parents, the use of community resources, and the extensive use of parents and volunteers.

In brief, the Stanford Accelerated Schools Project involves features such as periodic assessment, a language-based approach to learning, and a curriculum that emphasizes relevancy of material and a problem-solving orientation. Parents are actively involved and must sign a written agreement regarding their roles and responsibilities; they also have an opportunity to interact with the school program. The Project offers an extended day program which uses college and senior citizen volunteers for peer tutoring and cooperative learning activities and which is designed, in part, to meet the needs of latchkey children.

In addition to the mechanics of the program, and equally important, are the assumptions behind the Accelerated Schools Project. First, for an effective program, a unity of purpose must exist; administrators, teachers, parents, and students must all share a common set of goals. Second, the empowerment of all major actors in the schools (administrators, teachers, parents, and students) is critical. All of these people are involved in decision making. The deadlocks that traditionally exist -- with parents blaming the schools and the schools blaming the parents, the administrators blaming the teachers and the teachers blaming the administrators, etc. -- are eliminated and all parties assume responsibility for decisions. Third, the Stanford Accelerated Schools Project seeks support and involvement from youth organizations, senior citizens, businesses, and religious groups. In this manner, it builds upon the strengths of parents and the community.

In summary, it is also worth emphasizing that a new perspective on disadvantaged students is essential. Levin (1988b) stated:

> The strengths of disadvantaged students are often overlooked because they lack the learning behaviors of middle-class students. But disadvantaged students carry their own unusual assets that can be used to accelerate their learning. These often include an interest and curiosity in oral and artistic expression; the ability to learn through hands-on projects; the ability to be engrossed in intrinsically interesting tasks. In addition, such students are enthusiastic and effective learning resources for other students through peer tutoring and cooperative learning approaches (p. 3).

Programming at the Secondary Level. The approaches listed above represent current interventions on the elementary and, to a lesser degree, middle school level. At the secondary level, dropout prevention efforts dominate the literature on at-risk students. Once again, it is worth noting that many approaches to dropout prevention currently exist; only selected major themes in the literature will be presented here.

McDill, Natriello, and Pallas (1986) cited several alterable school factors that may aid in keeping at-risk students in school. First, the school atmosphere must emphasize teacher-student contact and support. Schools with considerable social disorganization, such as high truancy rates and substantial discipline problems, can work to improve the school atmosphere by improving staff-administrator relationships and by instituting fair and consistent discipline policies. Schools must also strive to maintain an environment supportive of high achievement. One possible approach to establishing this environment is through a system of rewards, such as learning contracts or token economies that reinforce effort and achievement.

Several authors (Hahn et al., 1987; Hamilton, 1986; McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986) have suggested that schools need to individualize their instruction and curriculum for those students who are at risk of academic failure and who suffer from low self-esteem. Schools should, therefore, provide students with flexible time options

for completing their education. Some students, for example, may need a program of less concentration but a longer duration -- a five or six year program with work-study options. Indeed, Hamilton (1986) argued that many at-risk students would benefit from more out-of-school experiences and more intensive work-related training. Community-based learning, he argued, leads to enhanced positive attitudes as well as increased achievement for at-risk students.

Perhaps the most popular approach to programming for secondary at-risk students is the alternative school approach. Certainly removing students from the mainstream must be done with care. Hamilton (1986) stated that separate programs can be justified only if the basis for the recommendation is substantial and the program is clearly understood by both the student and the student's parents. Nevertheless, the alternative school approach enjoys widespread popularity. Wehlage (1983) described the characteristics of effective alternative programs. Programs must be small enough to promote face-to-face contact between teachers and administrators as well as between teachers and students. Effective programs are generally run by a small group of energetic teachers who feel empowered and are able to be creative in approaching difficult-to-teach students. A positive teacher culture thus develops in effective programs, and teachers adopt a positive attitude relative to students' potential and relative to their own abilities as teachers. Teachers in these effective programs tend to see themselves as having a counseling role with students and encourage students toward trust relationships and social bonding with adults.

Many of the factors involved in effective alternative programs are also effective with secondary youth in general. The teachers in effective programs have high expectations of the students and firm, consistent guidelines for student behavior. They exhibit a collegiality which, in turn, develops a family style atmosphere in the school.

This fosters a cooperative atmosphere among the students and a supportive peer culture. In terms of curriculum, the emphasis in effective programs is on, according to Wehlage (1983), an individualized approach and real-life problem solving. Out-of-school experiences and community involvement are beneficial. In summary, experiences for secondary at-risk youth should be designed to develop a sense of responsibility, a sense of self-efficacy and competence, and a positive self-image (pp. 32-40).

ESTABLISHING STUDENT AT-RISK PROGRAMS AT THE LOCAL SCHOOL LEVEL

"Policymakers as leaders and society as a whole must act to save our children. Parents, communities, businesses, and schools must act in concert. But we in the schools cannot wait for other segments of society and other institutions to step up to the challenge. The children are here - now." (Strong, 1989, p. 2)

Most educators at the local level already are painfully aware of the presence of at-risk children and youth within their schools. Teachers and building principals daily interact with these students. It is the rare educator who has not experienced frustration trying to teach students who are victims of substance abuse, impoverished environments, lack of family support, low self-esteem, etc. The problems presented by these students, individually and collectively, frequently are perceived as overwhelming by educators. Understandably they often express concern relative to what they can realistically do to help many of these students.

Clearly, educators at the local level may find themselves at a serious disadvantage as they attempt to work with students whose "problems" are primarily the result of outside influences and conditions. Their potential for having a positive impact upon at-risk children and youth may, in fact, be limited. Given the relatively limited amount of time that teachers have to work with students considered to be at risk, it is extremely difficult for them to substantially alter many of the broad-based societal negative cycles in which many of these students find themselves.

Nevertheless, it is suggested that educators at the local level must not adopt an attitude of the "the task is impossible, and therefore, I cannot help." A more appropriate

and positive outlook would be: Despite the odds, there are things which can be done within the educational environment to improve the overall quality of life for at-risk children -- even if only in small ways.

Educators' efforts in this regard may not be of a magnitude which will result in major changes for at-risk students; yet, they can still be significant. Feelings of helplessness or even cynicism, only serve to exacerbate the problems faced by these children. For many at-risk students these have been the predominant attitudes that have shaped their lives.

The following six-stage model (Figure 2) is designed to assist educators at the local level develop a system to (a) identify actual and potential at-risk students, and (b) implement programs to help these students.

MODEL FOR SERVING AT-RISK STUDENTS AT THE LOCAL SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEVEL

1. Definition of Population
2. Identification of Characteristics or Indicators of At Risk
3. Needs Assessment of Current Strengths and Weaknesses
4. Development of a Comprehensive Plan
5. Program Development, Implementation, and Intervention
   - A. Crisis Intervention
   - B. Prevention
   - C. Long-Range Programming
6. Evaluation

Figure 2.

1. Definitions of At-Risk Students:

It is extremely important that educational policymakers at the local level develop an operational definition of those students who appear to be at risk. Clearly, this is a difficult task. Priorities will need to be established. One could argue that practically every student could be considered to be at risk. However, research suggests that some students are at greater risk than are others. One of the major keys to prevention of school failure is the identification of students who appear to be most susceptible -- those who have already demonstrated those specific behaviors which are correlated with school failure and/or those who manifest the potential for failure in this area.

While LEAs develop the identification process it is important to keep local conditions and variables in mind. Programs designed to serve at-risk students may vary considerably contingent upon local factors and needs. For example, some local school systems may have large numbers of limited-English, ethnic minority students while others may have few, if any, of these students. The same could be said for any of the other factors and conditions which have been shown to constitute major indicators of at risk. It should not be assumed that any one child, simply because he/she is a representative of a "high risk" group necessarily requires a special program or intervention. Nevertheless, it is important for LEAs to be aware of those conditions and factors which have been shown to have a high correlation with school failure and to screen these particular students very carefully.

2. Characteristics or Indicators of At-Risk:

The individual characteristics listed below are included to assist local school personnel establish a mechanism to identify and to monitor students who may be at high risk. Not all students who exhibit one or more of these characteristics experience school failure. In fact, some students may exhibit an "at-risk profile" which reflects several indicators, yet they may be doing well in school. Nevertheless, students who possess two or more of the following characteristics generally are considered to be of relatively high risk, and they should be monitored closely. In this regard, some LEAs may find it helpful to establish a screening/identification system whereby student characteristics are weighted according to locally established criteria. For example, "two or more years older than other students in the same grade" might be assigned a 3 score (highest) on a 1-3 scale. An overall profile of at-risk indicators then could be developed for each student, which would yield a total at-risk factor score.

Major Characteristics or Indicators of At-Risk Students:

* ***Member of minority racial/ethnic group***
* ***Family in lower economic level (e.g., eligible for free or reduced lunch)***
* ***Living in single-parent family***
* ***Low educational status of family, especially mother***
* ***Two or more years older than other students in same grade***
* ***Poor school attendance (e.g., absent once a week or three or more times a month without a valid reason or acceptable excuse)***
* ***Frequent transfers between schools***
* ***Below grade level performance (e.g., one or more years behind their age level group in math or reading skill levels)***

* *Consistent low scores on standardized achievement tests (e.g., students who score at or below 25th percentile on standardized achievement tests)*
* *Lack of motivation/interest in school -- low aspirations*
* *Disruptive or inappropriate behaviors in school or community (e.g., frequent suspensions; trouble with the law)*
* *Unstable home; dysfunctional family situation.*
* *Poor attitudes of parents toward school (lack of parental support or encouragement)*
* *Limited-English proficiency*
* *Employment in a job that interferes with schooling (e.g., 10 hours a week - potential interference; 15 or more hours a week - serious interference)*
* *Low self-esteem*
* *Alcohol/substance abuse*
* *Incompatible values with school (diverse value system)*
* *Medical health problems*
* *Teenage pregnancy or teenage parent (premature assumption of adult roles)*
* *Retention in one or more grades*
* *Limited involvement in extracurricular activities*
* *Severe depression - Suicide attempts*
* *Above average or below average intelligence*
* *Inappropriate/poor peer relationships*
* *Victim of physical, emotional or sexual abuse*
* *Eligibility for or participation in special education, compensatory, or remedial programs*

3. Needs-Assessment of Current Program Strengths and Weaknesses:

Once local school systems have determined the numbers and types of students considered to be at risk, the next step is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the programs, resources, and strategies for intervention within the school or district. Most likely several programs already exist which are designed to serve either exclusively, or partially, specific types of at-risk students. Rather than seek to establish new programs or employ additional personnel, existing resources and programs should be assessed and utilized whenever possible. Often, with minor refocusing, current programs and personnel can be used to reduce the number of at-risk students.

At the same time, weaknesses and gaps need to be identified. For example, does any program presently exist which addresses teenage mothers who may remain in school if an appropriate program could be established for them? Also, what programs exist within the school for students who are alcohol or drug dependent? What types of remedial or compensatory academic programs exist for low-achieving students? How actively are known homeless children sought out and what policies and procedures exist to deliver educational services to this population? What policies and programs exist within the school for students who are chronically truant?

While in the process of conducting an at-risk student needs assessment, it is important that personnel adopt a broad perspective and give full consideration to community-wide needs and resources. As the problems of many at-risk youth are family and community based, likewise often are their solutions. Therefore, schools must not ignore the impact of family and community influences upon at-risk students. They

need to actively involve the family and community, to the maximum extent possible, in their efforts to serve at-risk children.

Interested readers may find the assessment model, "Assessment Instrument to Determine District/Community Needs Relating to Children At Risk" developed by the National Schools Boards Association in An Equal Chance: Educating At-Risk Children to Succeed (NSBA, 1989, pp. 40-43).

4. Development of a Comprehensive Plan:

Following the definition, identification and needs assessment stages, the next step involves the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan. Changes which need to be established and implemented should be identified. New and existing resources, human and fiscal, necessary to meet the present and projected needs of at-risk students must be identified. Personnel need to be clearly identified who will be responsible for the administration/coordination and direct service activities involved in the overall program. Staff roles and relationships should be clearly delineated. Goals and objectives must be clearly established. Finally, an evaluation plan, which should be both formative and summative in design, needs to be developed and implemented.

The ultimate success of the local school district's comprehensive plan to serve at-risk students will likely depend on several critical factors. First, it should not be separate from the district's overall school improvement efforts. Second, public support for the plan is necessary, and a concerted effort should be made to solicit broad-based community input and cooperation. Third, real commitment and hard work are necessary. There must exist a strong belief that the program will produce benefits for at-risk

students, and all personnel involved in the various programmatic aspects of the plan must be willing to work very diligently to ensure its success.

5. Basic Approaches for Program Development, Implementation, and Intervention:

As emphasized in several other sections of this monograph, the problems typically presented by at-risk students are multifaceted, complex, and certainly not conducive to simple solutions. Nor, is it usually possible, or even desirable, for school personnel to provide intervention programs in isolation. In some situations, the school may be in the best position to provide direct services to at-risk students. In other situations, however, the school might most effectively function in the role of facilitator, or broker, of services. In this sense, the school's role becomes one essentially of a case manager. The specific needs of some at-risk students can be most effectively met by outside agencies and personnel. In these cases, the school's role would be to refer students to the appropriate agency.

It is suggested that schools at the local level should be involved in three distinct, but interrelated, program intervention strategies to help at-risk students: (1) crisis intervention, (2) prevention; and (3) long-range programming:

First, schools must be prepared to respond to individual student crisis situations. For example, a child who manifests suicidal behaviors must be dealt with immediately. In the same vein, students who are discovered to be suffering from abuse, lack of food, lack of appropriate shelter, etc., also require immediate interventions. There exist any number of conditions or situations which place students at high critical risk -- conditions which demand rapid attention and action on the school's part.

Second, a proactive approach by schools may reduce the impact of various at-risk factors. Among the various types of prevention programs which could be implemented at the school level are the following: (1) drug and alcohol awareness; (2) safe sexual practices; (3) building self-esteem; (4) promoting positive peer interpersonal relationships; (5) recognizing and dealing with abuse; and so forth.

Third, there is the need for schools to establish and implement long-range programs designed to deal effectively with at-risk students. These programs should be tailored to local needs and issues, and they should be offered to students as an integral component of the basic curriculum. To be effective, these programs should be presented as, and perceived by students, not simply an add-on fringe, but rather as a significant aspect of instruction.

The actual format for these programs may vary considerably among and even within schools. They, at times, could be quite traditional in their goals and content; however, more alternative program service delivery options should also be employed if deemed more appropriate. For example, teachers, counselors, and/or other regular school personnel would likely have the major responsibility for operating some programs. The students themselves, however, should be encouraged to assume the primary leadership role in other program areas, e.g. the establishment of student support teams to deal with certain issues (e.g., aspects of alcohol and drug abuse).

A selected list of resources which may be of help to educators who are interested in establishing new programs or in improving already existing programs for at-risk students is contained in the Appendix.

6. Evaluation:

Finally, the local school district should develop an evaluation plan to assess the efficacy of its efforts regarding at-risk students. The effects of programming interventions on student outcomes should be assessed on an ongoing basis and modifications made as deemed necessary. Both summative and formative evaluation data should be collected and analyzed.

In this process, school districts need to exercise considerable care in the often tedious, but necessary, record keeping process. An evaluation of district efforts in programming for at-risk children often presents a complex array of interrelated problems; therefore, a variety of outcome measures should be monitored. These may include, but are not limited to, the following: (a) measures of kindergarten screening; (b) measures of school attendance beginning in kindergarten; (c) approximate measures of family socioeconomic status such as whether or not the family participates in free lunch programs; (d) approximate measures of psychological characteristics such as self-esteem or locus of control; and (e) measures of truancy, tardiness, and discipline problems. Other measures such as the number of hours that students work after school can provide valuable information that can be used in a district's appraisal of its efforts. Of course, information that is routinely and commonly accumulated already, such as grades and standardized achievement test scores, is essential for any self-evaluation. In addition to examining student variables, a school district should undergo self-appraisal. This should include an assessment of its own discipline policies, communication networks, as well as school climate in order to assess how these impact upon at-risk youth.

Obtaining the information cited above is no easy task, and many districts will not be able to collect data on all of these measures. In addition, there exist many sensitive ethical issues involved in use and interpretation of this information. Clearly, any use of the data to either label or differentially program for students must be done with the utmost care. In attempting early intervention, districts must guard against the "Rosenthal effect" in which students who are labeled as "at risk" become so through self-fulfilling expectations. With these cautions, however, it is certainly better for districts to attempt an evaluation of their efforts to serve at-risk students, even with imperfect measures, rather than to leave their programs completely unmonitored.

In this effort, schools should attempt to assess the impact and interplay of factors in the community, in the home, and in the classroom as well as to evaluate the characteristics of the child. Obviously, many of these factors are outside of the school's direct control; still, in this manner, a broad, ecological view of the local problem of at-risk youth can be obtained. From this perspective, the district may identify those alterable variables which are hindering efforts toward better programs and services for at-risk students.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

"One of the cruelest myths of contemporary American life is the claim that our economy is healthy because unemployment is relatively low. This assertion conveniently hides the radical job market changes of recent years, the dilemma of one-parent families, the growing number of working poor, as well as the large numbers of people who have simply stopped looking for work." (The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Families, Final Report, William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship, November, 1988).

From the preceding review of contemporary issues involving at-risk children, a number of general themes and possible future directions may be considered by policymakers. It is also evident that at-risk children present difficult and multifaceted problems. No easy solutions are forthcoming. Nevertheless, policymakers need to be aware of some basic considerations as they develop policies at the national, state, and local levels. Specifically, we suggest that the following selected areas of concern need to be addressed: (a) the impact of changing demographics on children; (b) attitudes toward diversity; (c) the value conflicts between the child and school; (d) personnel preparation necessary for meeting the needs of at-risk children; (e) the regular education-special education relationship; (f) the future directions for research; (g) the interface between school reform and at-risk efforts; (h) the tension between excellence and equity; and (i) the broad societal changes which are necessary. Clearly, this list is not all-encompassing; it represents the major areas which the authors believe are important priorities regarding at-risk children.

In these attempts to synthesize the current themes concerning at-risk children, two populations must be considered. First, those children already identified as at risk. Examples from this population would be those already receiving services through special education, compensatory education, or substance abuse treatment. Second, those who have not yet been identified. Although for some of these children their needs are recognized, educators must be careful to avoid categorizing, labeling, and stereotyping while efforts are made to marshal resources to meet these children's needs. There are still other children, the "hidden" at-risk population, who are not yet identified but who are in jeopardy for learning and personal adjustment problems.

Impact of Changing Demographics

Changing demographic realities and societal norms may force a major change in our educational structure. For example, Levin (1985) has argued that the increase in minority composition of our society, the populations that traditionally have the highest dropout rates and have the most difficulty finding stable and lucrative employment, may lead to a dual society of "haves" and "have nots". Unless education changes to face these realities, Levin argued, our public schools may once again serve only a limited portion the nation's population.

In addition, the rapid growth of technology requires increasing levels of education for vocational success. Rumberger (1984) argued that in the past our businesses and industries created as many new jobs as were displaced by advancing technology. Based on labor market analyses, he projected, however, that this pattern was soon to cease and that widespread job loss due to technology would occur. This development would surely

exacerbate the creation of a dual society by intensifying already existing cycles of poverty and alienation.

Further, our society is getting older, and education no longer consists of the traditional pattern of K to 12, four years of college, and then out to the world of work. A recent study (McCaul, 1989) indicated that approximately one-half of high school dropouts return to school to obtain a diploma or GED within four years. At the college level, many more undergraduates are "nontraditional" as lifelong learning becomes the rule rather than the exception (Hodgkinson, 1985).

When these developments are combined with the present emphasis on raising standardized test scores, competing academically with other nations, and allowing parental choice over which school their child will attend, the diverse pressures on schools may be overwhelming. Usually, schools have been considered the great "melting pot," the great socializer and equalizer; yet the trends cited above make it difficult to conceive of schools not being faced with, and in turn perpetuating, an increasingly divided society. Public school systems may be forced to change their basic structure to accommodate a relatively few, ambitious, and technologically-oriented "elite" and to compete with other schools in recruiting able students. In contrast to this strand, public schools may struggle to provide a rudimentary level of academic skills to a large, unmotivated, poor, and ethnically diverse group of students. These students will present a variety of medical, social, and psychological, as well as educational needs, and public schools may be the "only game in town" with even a minimal amount of resources to address these needs.

Perhaps the future need not be so bleak as depicted above. Nevertheless, it seems likely that schools must develop more flexible options and abandon the rigid grade-to-grade progression for each student. Already, as outlined in this monograph, some

schools are experimenting with classroom restructuring and options such as peer tutoring and cooperative learning. In addition, some local districts have developed afternoon programs, Saturday schooling, and flexible scheduling. The use of parents and community volunteers allows schools to supplement classroom offerings and individualize instruction. At the secondary level, work-study programs and functional skill development have gained considerable favor as options for at-risk students (Hamilton, 1986,1989). In addition, some authors have argued for expanding the parameters of the traditional curriculum to emphasize self-esteem as well as personal and social skill development.

All of these developments, in fact, appear to indicate that schools must expand their traditional boundaries and responsibilities. As Gerics and Westheimer (1988) stated:

> When there is no promise of upward mobility to mystify the basic irrelevance of Algebra, American History, Biology, and the like, at-risk students have no reason to buy into the high school ethic. Middle-class students, under the sway of the dominant ideology, may continue to attend, but whatever their scores on standardized tests, at-risk students may be too shrewd to invest in an educational system that will do nothing for them. Why waste two or more years in school when a diploma will not change the job one can find? The fundamental problem is one of economic injustice for the underclass. Of course, schools cannot change the social structure, but they can change themselves. First, they should reconstruct their curricula around work experiences. Traditional subject matter will not work for at-risk students. Labor can be a cooperative experience breaking class barriers, increasing solidarity, and demonstrating the dignity of all human labor. Second, school authority should reflect school populations. Can a central board organization that is almost exclusively white be sensitive to the values it smuggles into the educational enterprise -- values that prop up the advantages currently enjoyed by the middle class? The same question can be asked about predominantly white school faculty. Third, schools can involve communities. Schools should not be isolated from their neighborhoods, lest they divorce students from their school environments and lose an opportunity to develop social control and discipline. Movements toward professionalization of education that set educational expertise against community involvement are misguided and will guarantee school failure... Practical implementation must be worked out on the local level, taking into account the interest and experience of each student, school, and community (pp. 58-59).

In other words, schools may need a different orientation, a different perspective, on the educational process itself. Schooling must be considered a lifelong educational process, as it currently is in Scandinavian and other countries (Toby, 1989). Similarly, the value of experiential education must be reconsidered, and apprenticeships, work-study options, and vocational training be reinvigorated. Finally, education must explore options for providing, or assuming a leadership role in coordinating a broad array of social services.

Attitudes Toward Diversity

In the effort to provide effective and meaningful programs for at-risk students, educators must confront the issue of diversity. At-risk students represent an extremely diverse population of children and youth. Wide differences exist among this group of students across many dimensions. They reflect different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. They reside in congested urban cities as well as in rural, isolated areas. Their family structure varies, ranging from the former more traditional two-parent household to having no permanent home at all. They live alone -- on the streets. They speak a wide variety of languages. Collectively, however, these students could be described as having one common characteristic -- vulnerability. They are vulnerable to failure. They are victims of broad societal intolerance and inequity.

Educators and policymakers need to examine their attitudes toward diversity among at-risk students. Their diversity often is not tolerated or respected by schools. It is even much less frequently promoted. The task of developing and implementing effective educational policies and practices for at-risk students clearly is a complex and formidable one. Dealing with diversity is seldom easy. Nevertheless, diversity brings

with it the potential for positive growth and change. If one of the major goals of American education is to provide students with those skills and attitudes necessary to live in a heterogeneous, diverse, adult society, then we must develop and carry out educational policies which truly reflect both a tolerance of and, more importantly, a respect for and promotion of diversity among our children and youth.

All critical educational policy decisions should be based upon a careful analysis of their likelihood for promoting long-term tolerance and respect for diversity among people. If the desire for conformity is the major goal of these efforts, at-risk students will predictably be short-changed. If the goal of American schooling is viewed very narrowly and singularly as the instrument for promoting national strength and independence, economically and militarily, we will fail to capitalize upon the more intrinsic rewards and benefits which can, and should, accrue from our educational efforts. Policymakers are faced with difficult and delicate decisions in this regard. On one hand, they need to respond to the pressing contemporary economic and social needs which exist, but at the same time, they must develop policies which do not undermine the more intrinsic values of education: those which promote greater respect for diversity.

Value Conflicts Between Student and School

Most of the contemporary literature dealing with at-risk students clearly identifies specific groups of children who are considered to be at high risk for school failure -- children from impoverished backgrounds; those from ethnic and/or linguistic minority groups; abused and neglected children; homeless children; children with emotional, intellectual, sensory, or learning deficits; those who are chemically dependent; medically fragile children and so forth. Unquestionably, large numbers of

these students are present in our schools who are also at risk -- but they are not as necessarily visible. These children may be referred to as the "hidden" at-risk students.

These students are a diverse group which often defies definition and classification. They may be intelligent or slow. They cross all demographic and socioeconomic boundaries. Some come from stable family environments; others from very dysfunctional families; they represent all racial and ethnic groups. From all outward appearance, and often from their behaviors as well, they appear very "normal" and certainly not at risk. Yet, these children can be found in most classrooms throughout the country. These are the children and adolescents whose values do not conform to those of the majority of their peers and teachers -- or even to society. They frequently are regarded as "misfits" within our educational and social systems. Gay and lesbian students, for example, often find themselves within this category. Their lifestyles are not tolerated by the majority of their peers.

These students may appear quiet and unassuming. Usually, they are not characterized as troublemakers. In fact, they often are not even recognized, not to mention accepted. These students are at risk because their values conflict with those of the school. Because of this, they are at risk of being educationally, socially, and personally devalued. Many of these students drop out of school because they do not feel comfortable, or feel intimidated, within this environment. Others, although they survive their schooling and graduate, never reach their full human potential and often look back upon their school years as an extremely negative, even punitive, experience.

Educators must make a special effort to recognize, accept, and help these students. Individually and collectively, they represent a potentially large pool of talent: human, social, and economic -- talent that is often wasted in American society because of intolerance and a lack of respect for their diverse value systems. Policymakers likewise

must ensure that these students are not inadvertently neglected as they prepare policies designed to impact upon more visible at-risk students.

Personnel Preparation

Issues and concerns surrounding at-risk students in our public schools have serious implications within the area of personnel preparation. Are teachers and administrators being prepared at both the preservice and inservice levels to deal effectively with the myriad problems presented by this population of children who are surfacing in ever-increasing numbers in their schools? There is evidence that some institutions of higher education have responded quickly and purposefully in this regard. It appears, however, that most teacher educators are just beginning to struggle with the complexities and changes which are involved in the development of programs to prepare personnel to meet the challenges presented by at-risk students.

Given the wide differences which exist between and among the various categories of at risk, university administrators and faculty within Colleges of Education must make important decisions as they attempt to provide their students with the skills and attitudes considered necessary to be effective with this "newly discovered" population of American youth. Teacher educators have three major responsibilities in this regard: First, they need to determine their own level of awareness regarding this diverse population of students. Second, they must demonstrate a willingness and commitment to address the problem. Third, they need to discover and implement effective measures to ensure that their students receive the necessary training.

The issues involved in preparing teachers and administrators to meet the needs of at-risk students are essentially the same as those which are involved with dealing with

any population of children who are perceived as being different from the established norm. Where do these children fit in -- in whose area or department? In an already full program which allows few, if any, electives, where should the needs of at-risk students be addressed? Should special education faculty be assigned the responsibility of dealing with issues of at-risk students? Or, should all faculty address the issues and concomitant programmatic considerations related to children at risk? Should separate courses -- or possibly a separate concentration or even entire program -- be established on at-risk students? What about teacher certification? Should programs be developed to "certify" teachers of at-risk students -- and efforts made to encourage state departments of education to establish a separate teaching credential in this area?

It is our recommendation that those individuals responsible for the establishment of policies and programs within the personnel preparation domain avoid the temptation to develop a separate training focus. At-risk students generally are regarded as reflecting the problems of broader society. Therefore, the proposed solutions to these problems should not be viewed as resting within any one department or area of a college. Separate training programs can only lead to fragmentation. Just as our nation's public schools clearly do not own the problem of at-risk children exclusively, no one area within a college should own the problem of preparing personnel to assist these students. All teacher educators must share in the commitment to develop creative mechanisms whereby their students can learn to deal effectively with at-risk students.

At the very least, personnel preparation programs will need to reexamine the ways in which they have traditionally operated relative to prospective teachers becoming exposed to students at risk. In particular, prospective teachers and administrators need to have regular contact in order to become more aware of and sensitive to the often complex problems faced by students who may be regarded as

"falling through the cracks," not only of our educational system but also of our society at large. Early field experiences and student teaching, for example, will need to become more community focused. In addition to, or conceivably in partial replacement of, the hours traditionally spent within public school buildings as part of these preparatory entry-level experiences, prospective educators would be more effectively prepared if they spent time with at-risk students on their own turf -- in their homes, on the streets, in homeless shelters, in drug rehabilitation centers, etc.

Some observers unquestionably will react negatively to the above suggestions for a more diversified and quite different appearing teacher preparation program. They will argue that these activities and experiences are not focused on education but rather on social issues and further that educational policymakers should be more concerned with "improving basic skills" as opposed to encouraging teachers to engage in pseudosocial work. In response, we would urge policymakers to employ a very broad vision to the problems of at-risk children and not establish policies which not only deny many of the realities being faced by these students, but also which likely will prohibit prospective educators from receiving those experiences which are necessary for them to better understand and to help those very students which most of them will surely encounter. In fact, it seems cost-ineffective, programmatically ineffective, and morally indefensible for either (1) teacher training institutions to place prospective educators into the field of education without more exposure to at-risk students and their environments, or (2) the American public to expect these teachers and administrators to be effective and accountable without this type of exposure and preparation.

Regular Education-Special Education Relationship

Related to the broader education reform debate involving at-risk students is the discourse, commonly referred to as the Regular Education Initiative (REI), which is presently occuring among educators. This debate, which is described in more detail in other sections of this document, essentially is concerned with a call for a reexamination of the policies and practices which underlie special education programs in our public schools. It is concerned with the interrelationship of regular and special education, particularly as related to the current policies and practices employed to identify, instruct, and place students who are considered to be "special," or "different."

Proponents of the REI are calling for a restructuring of the present dual system which exists in American public education: one system for "special students" and another for "regular students." They argue that the present dual educational structure not only is program and cost-ineffective and discriminatory to many currently labeled handicapped students, especially minorities, but also, by its very existence, it tends to discourage regular educators from assuming responsibility for the development of programs for a wider range of other at-risk students. Opponents of the REI generally are arguing that present special education policies and practices are basically sound and that regular education has a multitude of problems which serve to prevent the accommodation of handicapped students within the overall system.

The REI debate is important because it focuses on issues of diversity -- the very issues which are involved in broader educational efforts to identify and help at-risk children and youth. It is not simply about special education policies and practices as commonly perceived. It challenges educational policymakers to reevaluate how they view diversity among students. The REI focuses on current policies and practices

relative to a wide variety of compensatory educational programs (e.g., Chapter 1, migrant, bilingual, etc.). Many of the students who traditionally have been included within these programs constitute a large segment of the population now being referred to as being "at risk." Radical reformation of our schools, as some educators are presently calling for, may not occur. Nevertheless, the issues and concerns being addressed as part of this most recent educational reform movement, are important ones -- and they cannot be ignored by policymakers as they struggle to develop policies which are concerned with both excellence and equity issues involving at-risk children in contemporary America.

Future Directions for Research

As we have consistently noted, the issues involving at-risk children are so broad in scope, and so complex in nature, that they often overwhelm and paralyze educators' ability to act. Similarly, we are faced with a variety of possibilities for studying at-risk students. Future research can focus on academic achievement, personal adjustment to school or home, dropout behavior, or postschool consequences to the individual or society. Research may focus upon broad sociological and ethical issues, such as creative ways of combining services to both children and the elderly. Research may focus upon the development of economic training and incentives. It may also focus upon specific instructional strategies, such as computer-assisted instruction with bilingual students or contractual learning with students lacking motivation.

With all the possible approaches, which lines of inquiry appear to be most fruitful? Early identification forming a basis for effective intervention has received considerable attention. A recent study in the Chicago public schools found that dropouts

could be predicted 87% of the time by examining student grades and absenteeism in their first four years of school (Camper, 1989). This report stated, "Elementary school teachers should be initially responsible for identifying potential dropouts and they should assist principals and local school councils in devising innovative prevention programs before the dropout process becomes irreversible" (Camper, 1989, p. 7). The study also suggested more money for early childhood education programs and for special programs after school hours, on weekends, and during the summer. Regardless of what one thinks of these particular recommendations, early identification and expansion of the school's role into the social service arena, whether providing after school programs directly or working more intensively with human service agencies for needed programs, appear to be necessary to meet the needs of at-risk students in our changing society.

In addition, a change in perspective relative to at-risk students may help in developing new strands of research. Traditionally, research on educationally disadvantaged children has been based on a "deficit" model in which research attempts to discover the underlying problems of the student, and then educators construct a program plan to remediate this deficiency. However, as Wehlage and Rutter (1986) stated:

> Implicit in much research on school dropouts is the assumption that a better understanding of the characteristics of dropouts will permit educators to develop policies and provide practices that will reduce the number of adolescents who fail to graduate. The intent is noble, but the results have been negligible because the focus on social, family, and personal characteristics does not carry any obvious implications for shaping school policy and practices. Moreover, if the research on dropouts continues to focus on the relatively fixed attributes of students, the effect of such research may well be to give schools an excuse for their lack of success with the dropout ... Since traditional research has tended to identify characteristics least amenable to change, the focus of new research might better be directed toward understanding the institutional character of schools and how this affects the potential dropout... A new focus for research can go beyond the findings, now confirmed by a broad base of research, that those youth most likely to drop out come disproportionately from low SES backgrounds. Researchers need now to ask why these youth are educationally at risk and, further, what policies and practices of public schools can be constructive in reducing the chances that these students will drop out. It is important to conceive this new research in a way that looks for the cause of dropping out not only in the

> characteristics of the dropout, but also in relation to those institutional characteristics that affect the marginal student in a negative manner (pp. 72-73).

In this new line of inquiry, researchers may explore schools' responsiveness to students at risk and the school structure and climate most conducive to engendering a positive environment for at-risk students.

In exploring options for school restructuring, researchers can provide valuable information to policymakers by engaging in cross-cultural comparisons. For example, Hamilton (1986) examined secondary education in West Germany in an attempt to discover alternatives which would increase the holding power of our public schools. He found that German apprenticeships provided a compelling alternative to the in-class instruction commonly provided in America and that experiential education offered advantages for marginal students. More such research needs to be conducted in different cultures. We may have much to learn, for example, from Sweden's emphasis on life-long learning options and on the development of socially supportive youth groups. Clearly, alternatives from different cultures cannot simply be transferred to the American setting; differences in culture and local contingencies must be taken into account. Nevertheless, cross-cultural comparisons may provide policymakers with viable alternatives and a broader perspective with which to view our youth at risk.

Interface Between School Reform Efforts and At-Risk Students

The first wave of school reform, beginning with the publication of A Nation At Risk, resulted in a tightening of graduation requirements, an increased emphasis on basic academic skills, and a raising of academic standards. These developments led to a concern by some educators that school reform would have a deleterious effect on at-risk students. Natriello, McDill, and Pallas (1986), for example, argued that an emphasis

on more rigorous academic standards would lead to a rise in overall achievement test scores, but that the improvement would be due to "a greater selectivity of schools." They further stated that "aggregate measures of student performance should be based on a 'full enrollment model' rather than on a 'survivor model' as is typically done at present" (p.133). In other words, higher academic achievement should not be achieved by applying added academic pressure to marginal students and thus enhancing already existing feelings of failure and frustration with the end result that these students drop out of school.

The school reform movement has undergone several transformations (see the Historical Perspective section in this monograph), and efforts toward overall school restructuring for academic improvement as well as for serving at-risk students have, at least to a degree, blended. In addition, some of the premises of the original school reform movement may actually have helped at-risk students. For example, creating an orderly and safe environment and maintaining high expectations for all students has most likely helped both the college-bound and the at-risk student alike. Further, the "second wave" of educational reform, dealing with local school restructuring efforts and teacher empowerment, parallels efforts toward more effective programming for at-risk children (e.g., teacher empowerment is a strong theme of the accelerated schools movement).

In spite of these developments, the danger still exists that efforts at accountability through raising standardized test scores will subtly shift priority away from addressing the problems associated with children at risk. As Wehlage and Rutter (1986) stated, "holding power ought to be part of our definition of school excellence in a democratic society, where schools are to serve all of its citizens, not just the academically agile" (p. 72). We may expand beyond "holding power," beyond simply

keeping at-risk students in school. We must ensure that serving at-risk students remains a priority within the broader efforts at school reform. Our definition of what constitutes "excellence" must include working against the forces that may be leading to a society of "haves" and "have nots" (Levin, 1985).

Excellence Versus Equity

The recent widespread attention to at-risk students focuses to a large extent upon "excellence vs. equity" issues and values. Educational reform movements which have taken place in America during the 1980s reflect the "pressure points" which characterize this issue. The publication of A Nation at Risk challenged all Americans, and educators in particular, to develop more stringent academic standards, to reduce student illiteracy and dropout rates, to improve basic skills, and to make teachers more accountable. It called for stronger state mandates and regulations designed to improve education at the local level. Driven heavily by economic, political, and social policies which reflected conservative ideologies, A Nation at Risk -- and similar reports published during this period -- proclaimed the urgency to raise educational standards and to strive for educational excellence.

Can excellence and equity in our schools coexist? Or, put another way, given the strain on fiscal and human resources, is it possible for American education to adequately accommodate both excellence and equity at the same time? Although the issue of at-risk students in our schools and society often is viewed as critical and demanding of attention, this population historically has been perceived as "being on the fringe." As much as we would like to accommodate these students, they have often been viewed by many educators and policymakers as disruptive and as impediments to achieving excellence in our

schools. These students are demanding; they sometimes may take time away from the "normal" student. It has been offered that many at-risk students may not even want to be in school, and hence, are able to derive minimal, if any, benefit from this experience.

Unquestionably, the presence of at-risk students in our schools poses difficult problems for teachers and administrators -- problems for which there are often no easy solutions. Many of these children "don't fit in" to the mainstream of American education. They also don't fit into the mainstream of American society as a whole. Many of these children undoubtedly "lower" their school's mean achievement test scores leading to bad "report cards" for schools at the local level. Further, educators are correct when they state that they are often expected to deal with, and are blamed for, problems and "problem students" over which they have limited control. Teachers and principals at the local level are, in fact, expected to work with children and adolescents who are victims of abuse and neglect -- problems which the educator did not cause but which may have a pronounced effect on the student's classroom behavior. Certainly, many at-risk students enter the school environment already "broken." Is it even reasonable to expect that educators -- given their own limited control over external factors affecting these students, eroding resources, as well as the mandate to improve the quality of education for all students -- can help these students? In brief, the critical question for policymakers is: Is equity for these students in terms of educational opportunity possible given the pressures which simultaneously exist to promote excellence?

Value differences are certainly involved in this decision. Policymakers must struggle with what often appear to be competing value systems. What values do we wish to promote in our school children? What values do we wish to promote in society at large? America is changing rapidly; we are becoming a more diverse society. The forces and factors which serve to produce at-risk students in our society have been well

documented. Certain groups of students -- poor students, ethnic minority students, abused and neglected students, limited-English speaking students, students with low self-esteem, students for whom others have low expectations, latchkey children, students who are chemically dependent, among others -- do poorly in school.

As policymakers consider the vast amount of evidence and information which is made available to them to help them make wise decisions regarding educational policy, the excellence vs. equity issue is of critical importance. In the final respect, the values and priorities which policymakers individually and collectively hold and desire to promote will ultimately determine the answer to the excellence-equity issue. Possibly we have been asking the wrong question all along. The question of excellence versus equity may be moot and may be forcing policymakers often to choose between two goals: excellence and equity which cannot, and should not, be separated. As Mary Futrell (1989), former president of the National Education Association, recently stated: "We've only begun to address the basic issues related to schooling in America. For example, we've just begun to redefine the goals of public education. We've just begun to accept the fact that our schools can -- and must -- offer both educational equity and educational excellence" (p.10).

Initiatives at the Local, State, and Federal Levels

At-risk students represent a national concern. They constitute a national problem which requires not only a strong federal commitment but also the provision of the necessary financial resources to carry out this commitment. Obviously, schools should not wait in their efforts to better the conditions of our nation's children. Still, many of the underlying conditions that place students at risk -- such as poverty, the

lack of inexpensive medical care, and the lack of readily available day care, to name just a few -- need to be addressed in the realm of political and social policy making. Without federal leadership, the conditions for creating homelessness and poverty will remain and, most likely, will intensify. Certainly, national educational policies are needed which attempt to ensure full and equitable participation of all at-risk students in our country's public school programs. The vastness and complexity of the needs of at-risk children -- as well as the resources required -- prohibit individual states or local school systems from assuming full responsibility for remedying the problems involved with at-risk children.

At the same time, however, initiatives for the development of accessible and effective programs for students considered to be at risk must originate from the state and local levels. Each state must make a firm commitment to confront and attempt to resolve the problems of at-risk students. It cannot be left to federal mandates and resources alone. Although there may be similarities among the needs of all at-risk students, regardless of the region of the country in which they live, there exist many conditions and factors at both the state and local levels which tend to produce a certain uniqueness or intensity in degrees of "at risk."

For example, the problems of inner city youth might be quite different in many respects from their peers in rural regions. Recent immigrants to our country have tended to settle in large numbers in the same cities, helping to create an entirely different set of student needs and stressors on local schools in those specific areas. In contrast, some states have witnessed relatively little immigration of students with limited English proficiency or cultural diversity. In addition, state and local subsidies for education vary considerably among states as well as among individual cities and towns within the same state. Basic inequities may, therefore, exist for all students. The

presence of more vulnerable at-risk students only serves to intensify the problems for those states and communities which are already vulnerable for failure.

There is yet another reason why policymakers at the local level must assume initiative in developing effective programs for their at-risk students. They should be in the best position to define their own needs relative to serving these students. They should be in the best position to assess their own local strengths and weaknesses and to suggest strategies for remediation of especially complex problems. For example, while teenage drug abuse or teenage pregnancy may be a problem of national magnitude, these problems may be particularly intensive and critical in certain communities. To realize any successful resolution of these problems, strong local efforts and commitment are required. Educators in local community schools must be willing to collaborate with other agencies within the community, the family, and local citizenry to assume the initiative and responsibility for action.

Social and educational policies which are designed to improve the quality of lives of at-risk children are more likely to be effectively implemented if input is obtained and respected at the local level. If a given school district is firm in its resolve to develop policies to remove or significantly reduce conditions and factors that contribute to their children being placed at high risk, the possibility for success exists. Conversely, if local participation and input into policy development is lacking, there likely will be minimal commitment for change -- and subsequently, little chance for successful implementation.

At the federal level, our leaders have tended, as a rule, to target certain areas of priority for a decisive, one might even say aggressive, national response. Hence, we have "A War on Poverty," or "A War on Drugs." At the same time, many local citizens are fearful of federal intervention, of infringing upon individual rights and thus creating

too much dependence on national systems of aid and intervention. These attitudes may not be appropriate to our changing America. Obviously, the caution concerning creating "learned helplessness" is a valid one; perhaps, however, it is time to examine whether a portion of our apprehension in this regard is a vestige of an outdated pioneer spirit -- an attitude that has served us well but may have outlived its time. Our nation's children, among other groups, are in reality very much dependent upon us, and we may not be marshaling the resources necessary for them to flourish in today's and tomorrow's changing society. Instead of waging another "War" on a social problem, perhaps it is time to develop a new national perspective, emphasizing cooperation and concern, that reflects the mutual interdependence that is the reality of our present circumstances.

In their analysis of the future for educationally disadvantaged children, Pallas, Natriello, and McDill (1989) stated:

> Disadvantaged students are not a new phenomenon in U. S. schools. However, the size of the disadvantaged student population will assume unprecedented proportions in the coming years. Failure to anticipate the coming changes in the composition of the student population and to plan appropriate responses will leave us not with the same educational problems we face today, but perhaps with problems so severe and so widespread as to threaten our economic welfare and even our social and political stability (p. 21).

These authors further argued that a federal commitment was essential: "The magnitude of the problem suggests that considerable additional public resources must be devoted to schooling if we hope to be able to address the problems of disadvantaged youth. Such resources will be necessary on an unprecedented scale if we are to mount a serious attack on the problems of the disadvantaged" (p. 20).

In this vein, national leaders should clearly earmark children's physical, emotional, and educational development as a national priority and lead the effort toward more coordinated and comprehensive services for children. Most of all, this national leadership should chart the direction for attitudinal change so that society may make

strong commitments to children's services without the onus of eroding local control. Our at-risk children are truly dependent upon us, and we as a nation must assume responsibility for their welfare.

"Students at risk constitute the soft underbelly of our nation. They make up 'the third world' in education. They are alienated from the mainstream of school life. They are disconnected from their fellow students and from the education offered in traditional schools, in traditional ways." (AASA Critical Issues Report, 1989, p. 15).

The major purpose of this monograph is to provide policymakers with important evidence and relevant information to help them make better informed and more effective decisions regarding at-risk children and youth. Toward this end, we offer to policymakers the following observations and perspectives that we believe will be of assistance as they engage in the extremely complex, but vitally important task of developing appropriate policies for this population. Our comments are directed, in the broad sense, to all policymakers who are concerned about at-risk children and youth. More specifically, the following observations and perspectives are directed at those policymakers who are responsible for the development, implementation, and monitoring of educational policies involving at-risk students.

(1) Immediate Action and a Firm Commitment Are Required.

The current attention on at-risk children in society, in general, and in education, in particular, must not be viewed as "just another buzzword" nor simply as the "latest fad of educational reform" in America. Although the term, at risk, indeed may have become overused in everyday parlance and even employed rather capriciously at times in national tabloids, there exists widespread evidence gathered from respected and reliable

sources representing several professional disciplines that many children in America are, in fact, currently at high risk. Sufficient data have been collected which present clear and conclusive evidence that many children and youth presently are in grave danger -- personally, socially, and educationally. Further, an analysis of those conditions, factors, and demographic trends which are generally considered to place children at risk in this country strongly suggest that the numbers of these children are likely to increase dramatically during the next twenty to thirty years.

In brief, the problems faced by at-risk children today in America are real, complex, multifaceted, and predictably will increase -- not decrease -- in the foreseeable future. Likewise, these problems generally do not lend themselves to simple solutions. They will require national, state, and local attention and action. Further, they will require broad-based collaborative planning among a wide variety of public and private agencies and groups. Finally, in order to substantially reduce the numbers of at-risk children and youth and to truly have a significant, positive impact upon this population, there must exist a firm commitment to provide the necessary resources -- both fiscal and human.

In this regard, it appears inevitable that national, state, and local priorities will need to be re-assessed: both programmatic and fiscal priorities. If we, as a nation, and more specifically, as educators, are truly concerned about improving the quality of lives of today's and tomorrow's youth, we must first re-assess our values, priorities, and level of commitment to effect change. The only other alternatives available would be either (a) to ignore or deny the severity of the problem, and/or (b) to develop short-term, band-aid strategies -- strategies which predictably will result in fragmented, isolated, and woefully inadequate solutions. The worst approach of all, however, would be to do nothing and hope that the problem will disappear.

(2) Federal, State, and Local Initiatives Are Needed.

Because of the complexity of the problems of at-risk children, individual local education agencies and even individual states should not be expected to deal with these problems alone. Strong federal leadership and commitment is needed to address the issues and to marshal necessary fiscal and human resources. Federal-level initiatives must include minimal standards to be established on a nationwide basis to ensure that every student considered to be at risk, regardless of where in the nation he or she resides, will have access to basic educational opportunities. At the same time, each state, and more importantly, each local school district, must initiate efforts, tailored to their own unique characteristics, to meet the needs of its "local" population of at-risk students.

Clearly, the issue of locus of control represents a very delicate point of controversy relative to the education of at-risk students. Recently, many educators have been calling for less federal control and fewer mandates involving educational matters. Referred to as the "fourth wave" of educational reform (Futrell, 1989), this movement focuses on democratic, grassroots reform at the local level and demands a "return to schools that are organized to facilitate educational renewal and improvement from the bottom up" (p. 13).

Certainly there is much good to be said for local control and teacher empowerment regarding the education of at-risk students. Without both a strong leadership role and an equally strong commitment at the school building or district level, it is unlikely that effective pr grams for this population of students could be developed and implemented. At the same time, however, the problems of at-risk children reflect broader societal problems and inequities -- problems and inequities which demand national attention, leadership, and resources as well. Policymakers will

need to balance these control and responsibility issues and concerns very carefully. Hopefully, recognition of the current urgency of the problem of at-risk students will foster cooperation and reduce the level of unnecessary bickering, allowing all educators to mobilize and concentrate their efforts toward resolution.

(3) Sound Policies Must Be Developed and Implemented.

Policymakers must guard against the attitude that "the problems of at-risk children and youth are so complex, overwhelming, and multifaceted that they are essentially unsolvable. " In the same vein, they must avoid begging the questions: "Can we really define which children are at risk?" "No-one agrees as to what type of program works best for at-risk students" -- the "research results are inconclusive" syndrome. Therefore, we need to begin from scratch with respect to program development and implementation for these students.

At the risk of oversimplification, it is suggested that despite the admittedly complex nature and scope of the problem, (a) it <u>is</u> possible to develop and implement sound policies which can have a major impact upon reducing the number of at-risk children and youth in America; (b) we <u>already know</u> what the major factors and conditions are which place most students at risk; and (c) we <u>already have identified</u> specific educational programs and practices which have proven to be largely effective with various samples of at-risk students.

The larger issues and questions which need to be considered by policymakers, therefore, are the following: (a) Does a real commitment exist for change? (b) Are we truly willing to re-assess our priorities, values, and assumptions regarding those forces and factors, both those in broad society as well as those within the educational environment, which have been demonstrated to place large numbers of children at risk?

and (c) Does a real willingness exist not only to secure those resources necessary to deal with the problem but also to make a determined, sustained effort to reverse the negative cyclical effects that previous and current misguided social and educational policies have had upon at-risk children and youth in this country.

(4) Attitudes Toward Diversity Need To Be Examined.

It was noted earlier in this document that some students may be considered at risk because they are viewed as being different from the established norm. The value systems of these students, either blatantly or subtly, conflict with the traditionally accepted values of the school. Because of these value conflicts, these students are sometimes devalued, and in extreme cases even ridiculed. As a result, many of these students suffer from poor social adjustment; they are ostracized, treated as discipline problems, and often pressured to modify their behaviors, beliefs or values.

Developing curricula and programs that promote a valuing of diversity is clearly a sensitive and formidable task. Values clarification exercises and instruction in ethics conflict with the widely-held belief that our public schools should not be in the business of moral instruction. Yet, there are compelling reasons for teaching tolerance and positive attitudes toward diversity. First, nations are rapidly becoming more mutually dependent -- the days of national independence are gone; the era of cultural, social, economic, and even military interdependence is here. Second, and closer to the purpose of this monograph, America is becoming more ethnically diverse. Birthrates for ethnic minorities are increasing; birthrates for white America are decreasing. Hodgkinson (1985) stated that "it is equally clear that what is coming toward the educational system is a group of children who will be poorer, more ethnically and linguistically diverse, and who will have more handicaps that will affect their learning" (p. 7). Can schools

afford to turn their backs on these realities and assert that promoting a greater tolerance of diversity is someone else's job? Will tomorrow's schools be forced to teach tolerance in order to maintain some semblance of safety and order -- in short, even to survive?

Hopefully, schools will have already begun efforts toward promoting tolerance of student differences before crises emerge to force more reactive approaches. Many schools are perhaps already doing more than they realize. Promoting a safe and orderly environment for all students regardless of their personal beliefs and values, as well as creating a positive school climate, help to model and promote respect for diversity. Certainly, more formal curricula and programs designed to promote tolerance and respect for individual differences need to be developed and implemented. Nevertheless, the most effective approach may be for school administrators and teachers to critically examine their own beliefs and attitudes with a view to becoming less prejudicial, more tolerant, and more respectful of those who hold different values. In this fashion, they may become more effective role models for tomorrow's students who may be faced with either tolerating diversity or living in constant conflict and tension.

*(5) **Conceptions of Schooling Must Change.***

For most of us, when we think of public schools, we envision rows of desks, a cloakroom in one corner, and a blackboard and large, oak teacher's desk in the front. Progress consists of moving from grade to grade, and success means receiving a high school diploma -- in fact, for some us, the diploma means never having to suffer through another 50 minute class. Although facetious, this description illustrates how deeply rooted our conceptions of "schooling" really are. It is as difficult for the lay person as for the professional educator to imagine a fundamentally different form and

structure for public schools. One need only note the recent concern and preoccupation with solving the dropout problem by withholding driver's licenses to dropouts and other means, one way or another, to ensure that we keep more students at least physically present in public school classes through grade 12.

Nevertheless, a closer examination reveals that traditional patterns of education are changing. Recent studies (e.g., McCaul, 1989) found that approximately one-half of a 1980 sophomore cohort had returned to school for an equivalency certificate by 1986. In addition, the growth of technology will almost certainly result in lifelong retraining and education becoming the rule rather than the exception. As Hodgkinson (1985) stated: "Diversity is the American hallmark, and recent successes of the military and business worlds in their educational endeavors suggests [sic] a very different postsecondary world. Most institutions with which we are involved, from hospitals and local governments to museums and the workplace, today have an educational arm. Lifelong learning is here today for about half of the American adult population -- ready or not" (p.16).

Schools should not passively leave the patterns and structure of lifelong education to fate; they need to be proactive in their approaches to reconceptualizing and restructuring education, particularly for at-risk students. To a degree, this is occuring already. The movement toward accelerated schools involves flexible afternoon and weekend scheduling above and beyond the traditional eight-to-three school day. At the secondary level, programming for at-risk youngsters has included flexible work-study options, summer programs, and alternative schools with individualized instruction.

These approaches need to be continued and expanded. Perhaps, however, an attitudinal change is most important -- a willingness to expand the membrane of the school into the general community; a willingness to expand the role of teachers and

administrators to effectively marshal resources for the overall problems of the student; and a willingness to envision education as a lifelong process interwoven into the fabric of the social order. Pallas, Natriello, and McDill (1989) argued that "Educators must become more aware of and involved in the family and community contexts of their students, both to understand the problems these contexts present for the education of students and to learn to draw on the strengths of families and communities to enhance the education of students" (p. 21). In this era of a strict emphasis on academics, this will require educators to display considerable courage.

(6) The Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers Must Be Redefined.

As schools undergo restructuring, the role of the teacher must change. In recent years, we have, in fact, seen an expansion of teacher responsibilities into arenas previously considered the domains of administrators, nurses, and educational specialists. At the same time, the school reform movement has also escalated demands on teachers to raise standardized achievement test scores.

It therefore offers small consolation to teachers, already struggling with these difficult and sometimes contradictory demands, to state that teachers must assume responsibility as facilitators of services to at-risk students. Obviously, this view runs counter to those who view the teacher's role strictly as instruction in academics. The realities faced by many of these students, however, prohibit academic instruction from being a priority until more basic needs -- such as food, shelter, or some measure of family stability -- are realized.

Educators clearly are not solely responsible for providing these basic needs. Rather, they must consider themselves as "case managers" -- those adults who have daily contact with at-risk children and thus have the opportunity to perceive needs and

actively pursue coordinating the resources needed to meet these needs. In fact, many teachers are operating in this capacity already and, often, are frustrated by their dealings with school administrators and other agencies. For this reason, teachers need support of their role as case managers from school administrators. This role needs to be legitimatized, acknowledged, and supported. Without such a formal structure supporting an expansion of the teacher's role beyond traditional boundaries, an effective acquisition and coordination of services for at-risk children will not be possible.

(7) Political Action Must Address Societal Inequities.

Thus far, this monograph has focused upon what educators can do about children at risk. Indeed, for many at-risk youngsters, school is a focal point -- one with concerned adults, with caring friends, with safety and security for part of the day, and even with proper nutrition for breakfast and lunch -- and teachers and administrators may have an extremely positive impact on these children's lives.

Nevertheless, broader social and economic forces shape the population of children at risk and these impact upon educational experiences and aspirations. Fine (1986) stated:

> Yet, having a degree is more valuable for those already privileged by class, race/ethnicity, and gender. Women's returns on education have been estimated at 40 percent of men's, and black's approximately 63% of whites. High school dropouts who live in the highest income areas of New York City have a 42.4 percent employment-to-population ratio compared with a 31 percent ratio for high school graduates in the poorest neighborhoods...Even with the same level of education -- the high school diploma -- whites, men, and upper middle-class-students reap consistently more per additional year of education than do blacks, women, and working/low-income students, respectively (p. 91).

As we have seen, woven into the very definition of at risk are interrelated factors such as poverty, minority racial/ethnic group identity, poorly educated parents, and family structure. As long as these conditions exist, schools will be forced into the position of

treating the symptoms, the educational and social problems, already caused -- and in too many cases deeply entrenched -- by preexisting conditions.

Certainly, our public schools have changed since the era of the Coleman Report, and indications are that even further change is necessary. Still, as long as poverty, homelessness, economic disincentives for minorities, and dysfunctional families exist, schools will continue to encounter and to struggle with the problems of students at risk. Problems of this magnitude and scope do not yield to simple solutions, and they will present formidable challenges to tomorrow's leaders at the federal, state, and community levels. Nevertheless, in any serious attempt at meeting the needs of at-risk children, these larger problems must be addressed.

(8) School Reform Necessitates a Reassessment of Our Values and Priorities.

Students considered to be at risk constituted a major focus of the educational summit called by President Bush on September 27-28, 1989, in Charlottesville, Virginia. At this summit, attended by our nation's governors, the President outlined a series of national performance goals to improve the quality of education in America. At the conclusion of this historic summit, the President and governors issued a joint statement stressing the need to establish high national standards aimed at eliminating illiteracy, promoting diversity, improving student behavior and academic performance, allowing parents more choice in determining which schools their children should attend, and better assessing our schools' and teachers' performance.

Urging the nation's governors to take quick action on the issue of educational reform, Bush described the present United States educational system as "stagnant" and "requiring radical and tradition-shattering reform." Bush told the audience on the campus of the University of Virginia, "Come the next century, what will we be? Will we

be the children of the Enlightment or its orphans?" (Mashek & Cohen, Boston Globe, September 29, 1989, p. 12).

Long before the President's education summit took place -- and likely to continue long after -- policymakers in all states have recognized the need for educational reform. Pervasive illiteracy and rising student dropout rates have been the source of concern for many years. Both educators and the private business sector have expressed dismay at the large numbers of our nation's students who leave school each year without the necessary skills to be successful in society. The President's recent educational summit, however, may serve as the necessary catalyst to marshal strong support and commitment to improve schooling in America.

In their efforts to improve the quality of education in America, policymakers will be given a plethora of advice. Undoubtedly, consistent with the overall theme of the president's summit, individual states will establish their own performance goals and standards as well as mechanisms designed to measure the effectiveness of their school improvement efforts. Thus, predictably we will have national standards established along with individual state and even local school district standards -- each designed "to improve the educational performance of students." Also, predictably we will witness a substantial increase in the number of "report cards" issued at the federal, state, and local levels "to provide an accounting of our individual and collective efforts."

Arguably, there is nothing inherently wrong in striving for national, state, and/or local education performance goals -- as well as developing objective measures to assess the results of school reform efforts. However, it is critically important that policymakers who are responsible for educational reform not lose sight of the larger picture in their efforts to improve the quality of education in our nation's public

schools, especially those factors and conditions which have been shown to contribute significantly to children being educationally disadvantaged.

Raising educational standards for our students and attempting to increase school and teacher accountability as measured solely by "performance tests" could conceivably increase substantially the number of students at risk in our schools - rather than decrease this number. It should be remembered that many of the goals set forth in A Nation at Risk published in 1983 also were designed to improve the overall quality of education in America's public schools by raising standards and demanding more accountability. Yet, few objective observers would claim that we can demonstrate any substantive progress six years later toward reaching these goals. On the contrary, there presently exists evidence which would suggest the opposite. Granted, while improvements have been made in many educational areas, the number and proportion of students considered to be "educationally disadvantaged" or "at-risk of educational, social, and vocational failure" in our country has increased, not decreased since 1983.

If we were a "Nation at Risk" in 1983, we appear to be "A Nation at Greater Risk" in 1989. Policymakers must have a broad vision in their efforts to reform education in America, especially as related to at-risk students. Educational reform cannot take place in an "educational vacuum." Careful consideration must be given to those broad societal factors and conditions which have been clearly shown to place children at high risk levels for failure: poverty, changing family configurations, and the changing population of our nation. Likewise, policymakers need to give thoughtful consideration to the demographic changes projected to occur in America during the next twenty to thirty years. Educational reform, to be effective, especially as it relates to at-risk students, must be part of broader economic and social reform in our country. It also must play a

significant role in helping to shape and to influence our nation's social, economic, and political policies.

At the very heart of school reform efforts should be one basic question: "What is the purpose of education?" As a nation we need to reexamine the mission of education. What are the purposes of schooling? As Futrell (1989) stated, "The assumption still prevails that all will be well with the nation if the reform of education is guided exclusively by the goals of catching the Japanese economically and matching the Soviets militarily and politically" (p. 12).

Policymakers certainly need to be concerned about improving the achievement levels of our students. The level of literacy in this country is appalling given its availability of human and fiscal resources. Clearly, the future of our economic and political independence will depend, to a large degree, upon our ability to produce more literate and skilled citizens. Yet, this is only part of the solution to the problem. True educational reform must also give full consideration to the principles and values which we want our children and youth to have. What particular values do we wish our children to cherish, respect, and foster? President Bush advocated that a major part of our educational reform efforts should be directed toward "promoting diversity" -- a noble and much-needed goal. The question is, however, can this goal be achieved and measured primarily by some standardized test?

As policymakers grapple with the complex problems and the myriad of recommendations regarding school reform, we urge that they not allow the very enticing plea for the "establishment of high national standards and performance goals" to mask what likely are the more important problems which need to be resolved -- as well as the broad-based policies which will need to be developed to address them. Careful consideration must be given to ensuring that in our well-intentioned efforts to raise

educational standards and to improve student achievement scores, we don't create an even greater disparity between the "educationally advantaged" and the "educationally disadvantaged" that currently exists in our country.

Raising academic expectations alone for at-risk students will not guarantee success. Demanding more skills quickly without taking into consideration that disadvantaged students need both time and improved modified instructional programs -- as well as additional resources -- likely only will exacerbate the problem. Clearly, there exists solid research which suggests that teacher expectations regarding student performance play a major role in determining learning success rates for disadvantaged students. Educational norms and demanding teachers who expect their students to perform successfully are important for disadvantaged, at-risk students. Certainly, these students need to have high aspirations as well as teachers who believe in them -- believe that they can learn -- that they can "overcome the obstacles" which face them both academically and socially.

The positive impact that high teacher expectations can have for disadvantaged students has been recently demonstrated and given wide public exposure in the movie Stand and Deliver and in the book, Escalante: The Best Teacher in America, -- both of which portray the success obtained by Jaime Escalante in teaching disadvantaged Hispanic youth to achieve remarkable goals. Years ago, we witnessed another example of what a committed teacher who had high expectations can do for another "disadvantaged student": the teacher, Anne Sullivan, who refused to accept the fact that her blind student, Hellen Keller, could not learn. Remarkable teachers -- remarkable human beings -- both Escalante and Sullivan. And, there are many other teachers in today's schools, probably not as well known as Escalante or Sullivan, who "perform miracles" with their students who are "expected to fail."

We should be cautious, however, while in the process of giving credit to such dedicated teachers as Sullivan and Escalante, which is so richly deserved, that we not ignore some of the realities which exist in today's society which cause such large numbers of children to be a high risk for educational and social failure, and in so doing, avoid taking the drastic actions which are necessary to reverse the seeming cycles of failure and disadvantage which characterize so many of our nation's children and their families.

School reform, if it is expected to have any real long-range meaningful impact, must involve parents and the community. As suggested by Pallas, Natriello, and McDill (1989), schools should be viewed as "only one of several educating institutions that simultaneously affect an individual's growth" and that "remediation cannot be confined to the school" (p. 16). In their view, education is a process that takes place both in and out of school per se, and educational experiences come not only from formal schooling but also from the home and the family. "Students who are educationally disadvantaged have been exposed to inappropriate educational experiences in at least one of these three institutional domains [school, home, and community]" (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989, p.16).

School reformers may need to take a different view regarding how they involve families and the community at large in their efforts to improve schools. Many at-risk students come from at-risk families and at-risk communities. Children living in a poverty household or living in a single-parent family, for example, have been shown to be at high risk for educational failure. Similarly, children from minority racial/ethnic backgrounds are at high risk for educational failure. Students who live in communities wherein there exists major alcohol and drug problems along with inadequate resources

and programs to deal with these problems, also are at greater risk for educational failure.

Many educationally disadvantaged children and youth come from families who are struggling to survive -- personally, socially and economically. For many of them, their parents have had negative experiences related to their own school careers. Their parents frequently feel very inadequate and insecure when attempting to interact with a formal school environment which they, based upon their own past experiences, perceive to be uncaring and/or ineffective.

It is suggested that policymakers in their efforts to reform education in America's schools, adopt a broad view of the purpose of education. If the only outcomes of schooling are viewed exclusively as academic achievement, then the recommendation for the establishment of national performance goals as measured by standardized tests may realize some degree of success -- for some students. However, unless a broader vision is employed -- one which truly considers the indicators which have been demonstrated to correlate positively with educational disadvantage -- it appears fairly certain that the numbers of students who will be labeled as educationally disadvantaged in 2020, or even in 1995, will be much higher than currently exist.

It is suggested that school reformers consider bold, innovative strategies to help reduce the large numbers of at-risk students in our schools. These strategies and related programs must not be strictly academic-focused. Indeed, our schools might best serve their educationally disadvantaged and other at-risk students by functioning as a veritable "broker of services" to students, their families, and their communities. If our current educational system is as "stagnant" and in "need of radical and tradition-shattering reform" as suggested by President Bush in his presentation to our nation's

governors -- then let the reform process begin. However, let us be sure that this process is truly sensitive to the real needs which exist in today's families and society.

First, we must be clear regarding our expected outcomes. If these outcomes are limited exclusively to academic improvement which will be measured by national and/or state tests, then the proposed national performance goals may help. However, policymakers in their educational reform deliberation efforts, also need to give careful and full consideration to "other outcomes" which our nation's schools might be expected to achieve. For example, how can schools "help families help their children -- and themselves"? How can schools help ensure that "disadvantaged" students come to school "ready to learn" because they are not hungry or cold because of lack of appropriate shelter?

Some observers will claim that daycare, poverty, hunger, family crises, as unfortunate as they may be, are still not the responsibility of our schools. It will be argued that the primary, if not exclusive, purpose of education is to teach basic academic skills and further that our nation's schools presently have sufficient problems of their own without trying to become involved with problems within the family or the community -- or further still, that schools should not interfere in family and community affairs. Yet, these perspectives tend to ignore many of the realities of present-day society as well as documented research which shows the interdependence of school, family, and the community.

American teenagers give birth at a rate significantly higher than any other country in the western world. Although we may deplore or even condemn this behavior, it nevertheless is a fact that many young women never complete their formal schooling because they are pregnant. Further, we already know that one of the major predictors of educational disadvantage is "low educational level of mother." Thus, as increasingly

larger numbers of teenagers drop out of school because of pregnancy, the number and proportion of educationally disadvantaged children invariably will increase in the future. The cycle of educational disadvantage will continue. School initiated and operated programs which encourage pregnant teenagers to remain in school as well as those programs which provide daycare for them and other young mothers represent just two of the many ways which schools can help reduce the likelihood of perpetuating educational disadvantage in our country.

Certainly, educational reform must concentrate on efforts to improve the academic skills of our nation's students. We need to ensure that more of our students graduate with those skills which will allow them to be employable in a society which is demanding more advance technical training. At the same time, however, we need to ensure that our efforts do not create a divided society. Raising academic standards and administering more tests to measure how our students are achieving will likely prove fruitless unless more attention is paid to helping disadvantaged students learn and live in school, family, and community environments which are more conducive to overall personal human growth.

Policymakers need to be careful that their education reform efforts do not work against a large segment of the American population which they are being suggested as most helping -- at-risk students. Higher expectations without the provision of the necessary resources, fiscal and human, will only serve to place many of these students at an even greater disadvantage. Critical attention must be paid to the indicators that have been shown to place these students at risk. We, as a nation, must decide what the missions and purposes of schooling should be. We need to re-examine our assumptions about schooling and be willing to criticize our past and present educational policies and practices so that we can provide our youth with a better future.

Policymakers and educators at all levels will need to develop more effective approaches for dealing with at-risk students. This population of children and youth, once considered a distinct minority within our nation's schools, currently is in the process of becoming a majority. No longer will piecemeal, fragmented programming approaches work. Simple solutions to the problems presented by educationally disadvantaged students do not exist. Clearly, educators cannot solve the problems alone. Nor can they afford to blame the problems on others. Educators, arguably, are in the best position, however, to assume primary responsibility for facilitating those services and programs which would help to reduce the number of at-risk children and youth in today's and tomorrow's society.

New approaches will be needed to make schools more responsive to the changing needs of at-risk students in a changing America. Almost assuredly, schools will need to be organized and operated differently. Predictably, the roles and responsibilities of building principals and teachers also will require some modifications. Most of all, however, what will be required for effective educational reform are (1) a firm commitment to improve not only the academic skill levels of disadvantaged students but also to improve the overall quality of their lives -- not just in school, but likewise in their family and community environments; (2) a willingness to work extremely hard against what may appear to be unsurmountable odds to achieve the goals of reform; and (3) the provision of the necessary fiscal and human resources to guarantee success.

Most certainly, in order to obtain the resources necessary to eradicate illiteracy in America and to provide even a minimally adequate level of support services to help students who are at risk because of other problems or deficits, our society's spending priorities will need to be re-evaluated. Also, we will need to reassess our values. If we are truly serious about educational reform, especially as related to the large and ever

increasing numbers of educationally disadvantaged and other at-risk students who are in our nation's schools, difficult decisions will be required. We will need to ask ourselves some fundamental questions, and perhaps the most critical are: "What kind of a nation do we want to be?" "What values do we want our children and youth to respect and promote?" "How should we measure the success of our schools?" and "Do we really want our schools and society at large to respect and promote diversity -- or are we merely giving lip service to this often stated goal when, in actuality, we prefer to foster conformity among our nation's children and youth?"

"As the intellectually demanding and precariously balanced world of the 21st century comes into view, it seems clear that the mission of education must be not to train people to <u>serve</u> the purposes of others, but to develop their capacity to <u>question</u> the purposes of others. We must bolster students' will to seek wisdom. We must enable them to think creatively about complex issues, to act responsibly, and -- when necessary -- to act selflessly. We must convince them that the gross national product is not a measure of our worth as a people" (Futrell, 1989, p. 13).

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APPENDIX

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The following selected sources contain information which should be of assistance to persons interested in at-risk students. They represent only a very small sample of materials which are currently available on this topic. However, they should provide readers with a starting point in their search for effective programs for at-risk children and youth.

Accelerating the Education of At-Risk Students (1988)

Center for Educational Research at Stanford
CERAS Building
402-South
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305

- Summaries of major addresses dealing with at-risk students which were presented at an invitational conference sponsored by the Stanford University School of Education with support from the Rockfeller Foundation.

America's Shame, America's Hope: Twelve Million Youth At Risk (1988)

MDC, Inc.
1717 Legion Road
P.O. Box 2226
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

- A Report prepared for the Charles Steward Mott Foundation. An inquiry into the education reform movement of the 1980's with at-risk youth as the frame of reference.

An Equal Chance: Educating At-Risk Children To Succeed (1989)

National School Boards Association
1680 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

- A monograph which provides guidelines for local school districts in their efforts to develop programs for at-risk students.

Barriers to Excellence: Our Children At Risk (1985)

The National Coalition of Advocates for Students
100 Boylston St., Suite 737
Boston, MA 02116

- A Report which focuses on the critical need for equal educational opportunity for at-risk students in our schools, especially those students who come from impoverished, ethnic/minority, and other disadvantaged populations.

Educating At-Risk Youth

National Professional Resources, Inc.
P.O. Box 1479
Port Chester, NY 10573

- A Bulletin published September-June which serves as a clearinghouse on relevant information on a wide variety of at-risk children and youth.

Educational Leadership February, 1989 (Vol. 46, Number 5)

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
125 N. West St.
Alexandria, VA 22314

- The entire issue of this journal is devoted to issues dealing with diversity: at-risk students. Several articles, written by prominent researchers in the area of educationally disadvantaged students, describe programs which have been shown to be effective with at-risk students.

Effective Programs for Students At Risk (1989)

Robert E. Slavin, Nancy Karweit, & Nancy Madden
Allyn and Bacon
160 Gould Street
Needham Heights, MA 02194

- A synthesis of the latest research on effective educational programs for at-risk students.

New Voices: Immigrant Students in U.S. Public Schools (1988)

The National Coalition of Advocates for Students
100 Boylston St., Suite 737
Boston, MA 02116

- A research and policy report which documents the problems faced by recent immigrant students in our nation's schools. Recommendations for changes in school policy and practices are offered to help these students and their schools.

Students At Risk: Problems and Solutions (1989)

American Association of School Administrators
1801 North Moore Street
Arlington, VA 22209

- An AASA Critical Issues Report which provides detailed information relative to the forces and factors which place students at risk in our society. Brief descriptions of programs which are designed to help various categories of children and youth at risk are included.

Support Services for At-Risk Youth (1989)

The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands
290 South Main Street
Andover, MA 01810

- One of a series of packets developed by this organization designed to assist schools and communities in increasing the chances of success for all students. Other titles in the series include: Home and School as Partners: Helping Parents Help Their Children (1988); Pregnant and Parenting Teens: Keeping Them in School (1987); and Good Beginnings for Young Children: Early Identification of High-Risk Youth and Programs That Promote Success (1989).